

GOD OF GRACE: SPIRITUAL CARE OF BLACK MEN WITH SAME-SEX
ATTRactions WITHIN BLACK CHURCHES

A Final Project
presented to
the Faculty of
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

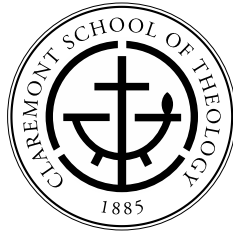
by
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May 2018

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has been presented to and accepted by the
faculty of Claremont School of Theology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

GOD OF GRACE: SPIRITUAL CARE OF BLACK MEN WITH SAME-SEX ATTRactions WITHIN BLACK CHURCHES

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This study explored the theologically-driven homophobic views of Black churches and its influence on the religious experiences of Black men who have sex with men (MSM). Using as a framework Dr. Richard R. Osmer's four tasks of practical theology, (1) The descriptive-empirical task, 'What is going on?' (2) The interpretive task, 'Why is it going on?' (3) The normative task, 'What ought to be going on?' (4) The pragmatic task, 'How might we respond?' this research examines the history of homophobia, its impact on internalized homophobia among Black men with same-sex attractions, and how these experiences encourage or discourage church involvement and pursuing spiritual enlightenment from the Black church community.¹ The research was comprised of reviewing writings, highlighting opinions from religious leaders and theologians, summarizing information gleaned from interviews with Black MSM, and coordinating data from national surveys. Findings indicate that while the Black community has often criticized political institutions or other races for oppression it should be noted that Black churches have also contributed to the oppression of Black men with same-sex attractions. This oppression plays out from pastoral leadership, members from within the church, and invariably influences self-hatred among Black MSM. Important next steps for pastors, church leaders, and the community to foster better relationships and ensure Black gay men are welcomed under the

¹ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 4.

tenets of Christian faith are discussed. Implications for pastors, therapists, family members, and congregations are outlined; and recommendations for future research are offered.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first and foremost give praise to God, the author and finisher of my faith. I am not deceived into thinking that this project, nor the completion of my degree would have been possible without the guidance, protection, and provision of the Good Shepherd. I am also grateful for the support and most importantly the prayers of the many that are too numerous to mention here, nonetheless to whom I am greatly indebted.

I am grateful to The Rev. Dr. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, president of Claremont School of Theology for providing me with the grant that allowed me to pursue a doctorate at CST. In the same manner, I am grateful to this esteemed institution, and Claremont Graduate University's outstanding faculty and administrators who have provided fertile ground for the cultivation of creative and academic thinkers.

I could not have asked for a better advisor than that of Dr. Nicholas Grier. He saw the scholar in me when I did not see it in myself from day one. He challenged me to dig deeper, and think outside of the box. His academic support and guidance has grown me theologically, academically, and socially which has made this an amazing, thoughtful and rewarding journey. I am grateful for the gift that he is to the "Academy." I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Grace Yia-Hei Kao, for her dedication to being an intricate part of this process. Her availability, support, recommendations, insight and wisdom over the past year and a half has aided tremendously in moving this work from concept to completion.

I have been blessed with assistance from awesome colleagues and staff at Claremont School of Theology, Claremont Graduate University and Loyola Marymount University. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me along the journey. I particularly thank John Freese, Robert McDonald, Stephanie Rice, Koala Jones, Dr. Ann Hidalgo, Rocio

Mendoza, Sulaiman Ahmad, Dr. Mark Pedretti, Ana Ortiz, and Reggie Melonson for assisting me from concept to the completion of this work. You have richly contributed to this final product.

I would like to thank, Chancellor Emeritus Dr. Jack Hayford and Dr. Jon Huntzinger of The King's University, and Dr. William James for the seeds which you have sewn and continue to sew into my academic development. I attended CST in a large part due to Rev. Dr. Cecil Murray who is a CST alumnus, and former pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal Church (First AME) in Los Angeles, CA. He currently chairs the USC Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement, and is a senior fellow of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. I count it an honor to be able to call him a mentor and spiritual advisor. The support of these theologians and scholars throughout the years has made this project and the completion of my degree a reality.

I am forever grateful for my spiritual father and pastor of over 26 years, Dr. Kenneth C. Ulmer for challenging me, and always championing me to be the best man of God I can possibly be. As for this work, thank you for sharing your invaluable comments, suggestions, and resources. I also thank you for allowing God to use you in the countless ways in which you have been a blessing in my life over the years.

Dr. Donahue Tuitt, there are not enough words to express my gratitude...I am grateful for the decades of true friendship and brotherhood. You walked alongside me literally daily, encouraging me every step of the way. You encouraged me to "peck, peck, peck" when I did not feel as if I had yet another mumbling word to say. You inspired me to remain true to my own biblical convictions and to ensure that my voice resonated in and throughout this work. Your insight, wisdom and scholarship made this a much better project. Thank you for sharpening me,

stretching me in order to broaden my horizons, and for the accountability to continually raise the bar.

Finally, but by no means least, we are not given the option of selecting our families. In my case I could not have selected a better pair of parents than that of Bob H. and Dorothy J. Wade, whom I love dearly. I am grateful for the innumerable sacrifices that you have made throughout the years and continue to make to ensure that I have a “better life.” Your unconditional love, unfailing source of support, and constant encouragement has always given me hope, and kept me on point even when at times I lost sight of my own goals. I thank my mother for raising me in the Church. She is truly the embodiment of the Proverbs 31, “*Virtuous Woman*.” My faith in God which she instilled in me from an infant to adulthood, continues to give me the strength that I have today. As a family, we will continue to intercede on her behalf by calling on Jehovah-Rapha, *The Lord Who Heals*, and believing the *Report of the Lord*. To my father for always making me feel as if I could ‘leap over tall buildings in a single bound’ I am grateful. He has always championed me to strive to be better, faster and stronger. A lofty goal which I have not always achieved. Nonetheless, he has always lovingly comforted me with kind words, and applauded me when I have done the best that I can do. God continually uses both of my parents individually and collectively as a tangible expression of His love for me. That which I have been blessed to achieve, and all I hope to achieve I owe to them. I thank my siblings Byron K. Wade and Tammye D. Wade for your love and support. I also thank my extended family (The Turner Family, The Stanback Family and The Howell Family) for the countless ways in which you have supported me and my immediate family during this journey. God bless you and I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The title and primary focus of this work is to address *God's Grace: Spiritual Care of Black Men With Same-Sex Attractions Within Black Churches*. If the Great Commandments and Commission of the Church are to love, and to make disciples, Black churches as a whole have made a feeble attempt in accomplishing these missions as they relate to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) community. Nonetheless, scattered amongst the many historically Black churches that have been oppressive of those within the LGBTQ community, there is a remnant of Black churches that do not exert the hypocrisy of homophobic oppression and do their best to be loving and welcoming. Although few and far between, these churches are loving and welcoming, *and* subscribe to a biblical theology that embraces the *same* Word of God which has inextricably woven into it God's grace, God's love, and God's truth for all of us.

The relationship between many Black churches and the LGBTQ community is arduous at best. Research has shown that religion in the lives of African Americans is very important.² Unfortunately, as it relates to Black men with same-sex attractions and their family members, many have been met with challenges in their pursuit of spiritual teaching and a supportive corporate worship community. Due to the overwhelming presence of anti-gay theological paradigms and theologically-driven homophobia within many Black churches, many African Americans that identify with the LGBTQ community may have a fear of being ostracized by

² Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano, and Nydia Garcia-Preto, eds., *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, third edition (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2005), 93.

“Christians.” It is these realities that have inspired this research in hopes of gaining greater insight into the relationship between Black churches and Black men with same-sex attractions.

As an ordained deacon and member of a non-denominational church, Faithful Central Bible Church, I have been afforded theological training which is Bible-based and Christ-centered, loving and welcoming, and has been void of denominational constraints. I have made an attempt to unbiasedly explore the present tensions and theological divide between the conservative and liberal theologies concerning this issue with hopes of landing somewhere in the middle. I readily admit that I take issue with the distortion and misuse of scripture on both sides of the hermeneutical fence.

Before delving further into this exploration about the relationship between Black churches and the LGBTQ community, it must be emphatically stated that interpretation of Biblical scripture is nuanced between all churches. Debating the attitudes and beliefs among denominations, or dissecting denominational bylaws concerning divisive issues such as same-sex marriage and salvation are beyond the scope of this research study. This examination centers around common themes that should be personified by all Protestant churches such as: sharing God’s love, caring for all humans, and providing a welcoming environment where all individuals can learn about God and curate a personal connection with their Creator. This study solely examines the historical relationship between Black churches and Black men with same-sex attractions, and the pragmatic underpinnings of whether or not the culture within Black churches lives up to the tenets of Christianity with respect to providing a welcoming faith based community for all individuals - in particular Black men with same-sex attractions who seek spiritual enlightenment.

There are advocates of same-sex marriage who argue that complete liberation and connection with Black church communities will not occur until these churches approve same-sex marriages. In contrast, conservative Christian beliefs contend that individuals who engage in same-sex relationships, are required to abstain from or abandon same-sex relationships and desires. The diverse theological paradigms concerning same-sex attractions and religion have been divisive for centuries. The focus of this research as a spiritual care project, will not be to fuel or exacerbate arguments of theology on either side. Its focus will be to illustrate to what extent these debates impact the formal worship experience in Black churches for men with same-sex attractions who desire relationship with God, their families, friends, cultural connections, and church community.

This project uses Dr. Richard R. Osmer's four tasks of practical theology as outlined in his book, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, as its overarching methodology. Osmer's four tasks are: (1) The descriptive-empirical task, 'What is going on?' which is addressed in chapter two, The History of Homophobia in the Black Community, (2) The interpretive task, 'Why is it going on?' which is also addressed in chapter two in the section entitled, Black Churches Shared Theological Stance on Homosexuality, and further in chapter three, Projection and Internalization of Homophobia in Black Churches and its Impact, (3) The normative task, 'What ought to be going on?' which is addressed in chapter four, Confronting Homophobia and the HIV/AIDS Stigma, and lastly (4) The pragmatic task, 'How might we respond?' which is addressed in chapter four in the section with entitled, How Might Black Churches Respond, and chapter five, Spiritual Care of Men with Same-Sex Attractions.³

³ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

The Issue Addressed

The fact that seven of the seven largest African American denominations have declared a theological stance against homosexuality raises questions about the relationship between the church and men with same-sex attractions. The purpose of this project is to take an in-depth look at how Black church's views on homosexuality influence the self-identity, social interactions, spiritual development, and church involvement among men with same-sex attractions. In particular, do these beliefs expressed within Black churches bylaws and in religious teachings encourage or discourage Black church involvement among men with same-sex attractions.

The discoveries from this research can benefit pastors, educators, counselors, policy makers, and organizers of support services for men with same-sex attractions who seek to be involved with a welcoming congregation. Findings can offer suggestions to Black churches on ways of improving their relationship with their congregation and the community. If pastors, counselors, educators, and political leaders can identify and understand how experiences within Black churches impact self perceptions and cultural beliefs about sexuality, they can tailor spiritual support services inside and outside the church to address these concerns.

To these ends, the research issues guiding this project are:

(1) how Black churches' philosophical beliefs about homosexuality influence theological-driven homophobia within Black churches and the Black community, (2) how theological-driven homophobia within Black churches contributes to oppression among individuals with same-sex attractions which are seeking spiritual guidance and community in Black churches, (3) examining the relationship between negative psychological self-identity and internalized homophobia due to experiences within the culture of Black churches, (4) analyzing whether or not there is a correlation between homophobic attitudes within the Black church and HIV/AIDS

infection rates in the Black community, and (5) these four issues examined, will be explored to answer one overarching question, “How might men with same-sex attractions develop spiritually, psychologically, culturally and relationally in a welcoming congregation within Black churches?”

Context

For the purpose of this work, I define Black churches as the Christian institutions established and developed into the following seven historically Black denominations: (1) African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, (2) African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, (3) Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, (4) National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated (NBC), (5) National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA), (6) Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), and (7) Church of God in Christ (COGIC).⁴ The seven denominations within the Black churches have differences in theology, ways of worship, music and liturgy. However, historically these institutions have three commonalities: (1) their dedication to serve the Black community, (2) a shared theological belief on homosexuality, and (3) members that identify as part of the LGBT community (openly or secretly) that are either laypersons, involved in church ministry, or part of the Church's leadership.

Two normal responses of Black churches to homosexuality is one of either, a code of silence and lack of dialogue, or one of open hostility and non-tolerance with respect to addressing the plethora of issues surrounding religion, sexuality, and same-sex attractions.⁵ Because of the hard line position that the Church takes against same-sex attractions, it often is

⁴ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1.

⁵ Elijah G. Ward, "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7, no. 5 (Sep 1, 2005): 497, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050500151248>.

negligent in providing resources and spiritual support in this area. Thus, many of the men who attend Black churches and identify (either openly, or secretly) as having same-sex attractions are ignored and/or belittled by sermonic messages from the pulpit filled with homophobic rhetoric, condemnation, and “derisive terms such as ‘fags’, ‘punks’, ‘sissies’, and ‘bulldaggers’ to refer to gays and lesbians.”⁶ In both instances, these men are left with the residue of an internalized homophobia.

Scholars in the fields of African American, religious, and gender studies suggest that men with same-sex attractions can be found serving throughout various ministries of Black churches. Although the Church is against their sexual orientation, because of their gifts and talents many of these men are allowed to serve in key positions, and are often considered the backbone of the ministry.⁷ Nonetheless, these men are confronted with religious homophobia and religious oppression with respect to their sexual identity. The result of this is that there are many men who sit in the pews and, dare I say, the pulpit who silently face the quandary of reconciling their spiritual identity with their sexual identity. These men quietly have their lives shaped and impacted by the adverse effect of that of religious homophobia which pervades in Black churches.

Justification

It was reported by the Public Religion Research Institute that, “...a majority (51%) of Americans perceive evangelical Christian churches to be unfriendly toward LGBT Americans, more than twice the number (24%) who see them as being friendly.”⁸ Further research has shown

⁶ Ward, “Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church,” 497.

⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 184; Victor Anderson, “The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual,” in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, eds. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 298.

⁸ Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, and Robert P. Jones, “A Shifting Landscape: A Decade of Change in

that, “Roughly half (48%) say they have no religious affiliation, compared with (20%) of the public at large. Of those LGBT adults who are religiously affiliated, one-third say there is a conflict between their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation or gender identity. And among all LGBT adults, about three-in-ten (29%) say they have been made to feel unwelcome in a place of worship.”⁹ Research shows that there has been a decline in church attendance of those in the LGBT community which is largely due to the conflict between the religious beliefs of the church and their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹⁰ The survey conducted by the Pew Research Center does not include data along racial lines. The research of this project is important because it is a step towards bridging the gap that remains in the lack of research focusing on the impact that the Christian beliefs and behaviors towards same-attractions of those within Black churches has on African American males. By examining the interplay between sexual identity and spiritual identity of the African American church culture, and its beliefs on same-sex attractions, this research will give a more detailed overview of the issues raised surrounding same-sex attractions and the hypocrisy present in Black churches. This research will improve the understanding of the impact that religious oppression by Black churches has in the decision-making process of Black men with same-sex attractions to either engage or disengage the Church for spiritual and/or social refuge.

By posing the question, “How does the Black church’s beliefs about same-sex attractions influence Black sexual identity, spiritual formation, and homophobia in the Black community?,” this research can assist Black churches in seeking a deeper understanding about how their church

American Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage and LGBT Issues” (PRRI, 2014), 21, accessed August 24, 2017, <https://www.prii.org/research/2014-lgbt-survey/>.

⁹ “A Survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times” (Pew Research Center, 2013), 11, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/>.

¹⁰ “A Survey of LGBT Americans,” 11.

culture may influence church attendance, involvement in ministry, and the beliefs about God among men with same-sex attractions. To address this subject six areas of existing literature and research are explored: (1) how Black churches' philosophical beliefs about homosexuality influence theological-driven homophobia within Black churches and the Black community, (2) how theological-driven homophobia within Black churches contributes to oppression among individuals with same-sex attractions which are seeking spiritual guidance and community in Black churches, (3) examining the relationship between negative psychological self-identity and internalized homophobia due to experiences within the culture of Black churches, (4) analyzing whether or not there is a correlation between homophobic attitudes within the Black church and HIV/AIDS infection rates in the Black community, and (5) the four issues examined, will be explored to answer one overarching question "How might men with same-sex attractions develop spiritually, psychologically, culturally and relationally in a welcoming congregation within Black churches?"

Audience

The discoveries of this research can benefit religious leaders and members within Black churches; educators, pastors, counselors, teachers, evangelists, music directors, and members. It will not only benefit the afore-mentioned, but further benefit those individuals who have an interest in understanding the experiences and challenges of Black men with same-sex attractions in the church; and those who invest countless hours working on the spiritual, psychological and social development of others in faith based or personal development fields. These would include those who are pastors, teachers, music directors and members of the LBGTQ community who are seeking ways to speak authentically about their own sexuality and their faith commitments.

Findings will offer suggestions to on ways to improve relationships and support services for African American LGBTQ individuals.

Review of Closely Related Literature

The History of Black Churches

In their book, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*, Pastor Anne H. Pinn and Dr. Anthony B. Pinn capture a clear and concise overview of the history and shape of the Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal religious movements. By explaining the evolution of Black Christianity, the authors address the ongoing contributions made by Black Churches to society, and their social impact. I will use this resource to substantiate the historicity of Black churches.¹¹

The Culture of Black Churches Regarding Homosexuality

In his book, *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*, Dr. Horace Griffin seeks to shed light on the dilemma created for the LGBTQ community in “the Black church” by its teaching that homosexuality is immoral. This work provides critical analysis and a historical overview of the interaction between the LGBTQ community and the Black church. This interaction Griffin characterizes as “oppressive and duplicitous.” I will use this book to support my argument that at the hands of the Black church those in the LGBTQ community have suffered oppression, humiliation, and denigration.¹²

The Culture of Black Churches and Theologically-Driven Homophobia

In the book, *Homophobia in the Black Church: How Faith, Politics, And fear Divide the Black Community*, author and journalist Anthony Stanford brings forth dialogue on the cross-sectional of religion and sexual identity. Although there have been great strides made in the

¹¹ Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).

¹² Horace L. Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2006).

LGBTQ community, within the Black church homophobia still exists widely throughout. This has caused many Black Christian gay men to become silent with respect to, and in many cases deny their sexuality. I will use this book to support my argument that Blacks are intolerant of homosexual behavior as it relates to the religious institution known as Black churches.¹³

The Relationship of the Black Church,
the Black Community and the Stigma of HIV/AIDS

In her book, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, a Susan D. Morgan Distinguished Professor of Religion at Goucher College in Baltimore, and Canon Theologian at the Washington National Cathedral, deals with the subject of sexuality which has long been a taboo in the Black church and community. Rev. Dr. Brown presents the argument that the views of the Black church and community regarding Black sexuality have adversely impacted effective responses to the AIDS crisis. She further suggests that the Black church's views have cultivated a culture of intolerance of sexual diversity. I will use this source support my argument that the presence of homophobia within the Black church and Black community directly correlates to its lack of response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic present with Black males with same-sex attractions.¹⁴

In her book, *AIDS, Sexuality, and the Black Church: Making the Wounded Whole*, Dr. Angelique C. Harris, a professor at Marquette University in the Social and Cultural Sciences Department of the Helen Way Killinger College of Arts and Sciences, sheds light on the AIDS activism which is taking place within Black churches in New York City.¹⁵ Dr. Harris gives the

¹³ Anthony Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church: How Faith, Politics, and Fear Divide the Black Community* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013).

¹⁴ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999).

¹⁵ Angelique C. Harris, *Aids, Sexuality, and the Black Church: Making the Wounded Whole*, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Studies in Religion, Culture, and Social Development, vol. 11 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2010).

revealing and transparent account that AIDS has taken a mortifying toll on the Black church and the Black community. At the time of publication, Dr. Harris stated, “Blacks made up approximately 13% of the total United States population, but almost half of all those infected with HIV in the U.S. are Black.”¹⁶ Research that was previously done has attributed this high rate to the lack of an immediate response by Black church leaders during the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980’s and even its lack of response to date. I will use this work to showcase how the Black church’s homophobia has exasperated the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS due to its belief that such conversations are inappropriate in the church.

Spiritual Care of Men with Same-Sex Attractions in Black Churches

In his book, *A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations*, religious educator Gary David Comstock sets the atmosphere for dialogue to take place in the Black church where there is traditionally silence with respect to homosexuality.¹⁷ With the perspectives of twenty African American leaders voiced in this work, I will use this source to support my argument that there is a need for dialogue in the Black church regarding homosexuality and Black liberation.

Theological and theoretical/conceptual stance

My theological stance on the matter is that at the core of ministry, spiritual care for all should be available regardless of one's sexual orientation. Black churches must come to grips with the suffering it has caused its members with same-sex attractions to experience in their lives, and right the ship with hopes of more positive outcomes. Given the present social climate, if the church is going to stay relevant, it must embrace the onus of its theological task of meeting

¹⁶ Harris, *Aids, Sexuality, and the Black Church*, Back Cover.

¹⁷ Gary David Comstock, *A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

the needs of the people, by making the gospel relevant and fleshing out its core tenants for a time such as this.¹⁸

¹⁸ Larry Kent Graham, *Discovering Images of God: Narratives of Care among Lesbians and Gays*, first edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 81.

CHAPTER 2

The History of Homophobia in the Black Community, Black Churches, Homosexuality, and Theologically-Driven Homophobia

The Black community and the LGBT community have both been victims of oppression. The Black community has been riddled with racial oppression, and the LGBT community riddled with homophobia. Both communities have been charged with the struggle to be liberated to a place of equality. Nonetheless, there is a sense of resentment that exists between the two. The comparison of the gay rights movement to the civil rights movement has some in the Black community incensed. All the while, the pervasive issue of homophobia in the Black community has the LGBTQ community enraged.¹⁹ Dr. Osmer's first task of practical theology is the descriptive task, which challenges all stakeholders in the spiritual care field who are analyzing a problem - to ask "What is it going on?"²⁰ To address the issue of homophobia in the Black community under Dr. Osmer's lens the "What" requires Black churches to take a deeper look into its history. This chapter examines the history of homophobia in Black community, Black churches, homosexuality, and theologically-driven homophobia.

The History of Homophobia in the Black Community

In his New York Times article, "Gay CNN Anchor Sees Risk in Book," Bill Carter quotes Don Lemon, the CNN prime-time anchor as stating, "'I'm scared...I'm talking about something that people might shun me for, ostracize me for..It's quite different for an African-American male,' he said. 'It's about the worst thing you can be in Black culture. You're taught you have to be a man; you have to be masculine. In the Black community they think you can pray the gay away.' He said he believed the negative reaction to male homosexuality had to do

¹⁹ ahoward6382, "The Historic Roots of Homophobia in Black America," May 21, 2012, <https://thegrio.com/2012/05/21/the-historic-roots-of-homophobia-in-black-america/>.

²⁰ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

with the history of discrimination that still affects many Black Americans, as well as the attitudes of some Black women.”²¹ Unfortunately, Don Lemon's sentiment in this article is one that is felt widespread among African Americans who identify with the LGBTQ community.

Because of its history, the Black community has a heightened sensitivity to the sexual demonization it has faced dating back to the Atlantic Slave Trade and throughout history to present time. There are many layers to the dualistic notions of sexuality that are embraced by the Black community. From the Black bourgeoisie class, which is considered by some to be sexually repressed,²² to the Black hip-hop community which is considered to be overt with its unfiltered displays of sex in music videos, to the high number of teenage pregnancies plaguing the community, the community seems to be polarized with either views of prudishness, or overt display of sexuality.²³ Despite the differing attitudes around sexuality across socioeconomic status and popular culture in the Black community, homophobia is common across the board. Researchers have shown that Black males are greatly impacted by homophobia.²⁴ The impact of homophobia is not only felt for Black males throughout White society, but in their own community.

²¹ Bill Carter, “Don Lemon of CNN Knows Risk of Coming Out as Gay,” *The New York Times*, May 15, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/16/business/media/16anchor.html>.

²² Thomas H. Wirth's *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) notes that although there was a tolerance for private same-sex interests and relationships amongst Harlem's elite, it did not apply to all segments of the African American community. With the public displays of homophobia of Dr. Adam Clayton Powell Sr., pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, through his crusade against homosexuality in 1929, and Dr. W.E.B. Dubois' firing of August Granville Dill after his arrest for homosexual acts in 1929 due to the potential of negative reactions, there was a perception that “...most elite African Americans were intent on maintaining a hyper-respectable public image as a means of personal and racial advancement.” 22.

²³ Horace Griffin, “Toward a True Black Liberation Theology: Affirming Homoeroticism, Black Gay Christians, and Their Love Relationships” in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, eds. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 134.

²⁴ Katherine Quinn and Julia Dickson-Gomez, “Homonegativity, Religiosity, and the Intersecting Identities of Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men,” *AIDS and Behavior* 20, no. 1 (2016): 52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-015-1200-1>.

Within the context of his own community, in a large part it has been historically unacceptable for a Black man to have same-sex attractions. As a group, Blacks mostly have conservative religious views, and thusly have a very negative outlook on same-sex sexual activities. Blacks may tolerate homosexuals, but many do not openly approve of their behavior. Further, in the instances of rare acceptance, there is the further caveat that the Black man with same-sex attractions will not disclose or display his sexual orientation in any manner. In his essay, "Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies," Dwight A. McBride quotes Essex Hemphill's, essay "Loyalty." Within that work, Hemphill states:

The black homosexual is hard pressed to gain audience among his heterosexual brothers; even if he is more talented, he is inhibited by his silence or his admissions. This is what the race has depended on in being able to erase homosexuality from our recorded history. The "chosen" history. But the sacred constructions of silence are futile exercises in denial. We will not go away with our issues of sexuality. We are coming home.²⁵

It is in this poem that Hemphill not only brings attention to the challenges facing Black gay men within their own community, but the painful reality that the community often ignores their existence.

The topic of homosexuality is a difficult one in and of itself for any group in society partly because it is steeped with controversy given all of the biased opinions surrounding it., There is another added layer of complexity when it comes to having dialogue about the subject as it relates to Black men. Robert Staples in *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* offers, "Even understanding the nature of homosexuality is problematic because the research is permeated by bias. On the one hand, there are those who consider homosexuality to be a genetic disorder and everyone affected by it to be a pervert. More recently,

²⁵ Dwight A. McBride, "Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 69.

there are those who declare homosexuals to be similar to heterosexuals in order to enhance the civil rights of gays. Some would claim that homosexuality cannot be a viable alternative for Black singles because that tendency is formed in early childhood.”²⁶ Nonetheless, with all of the theories that exist as to the cause of homosexuality, its origin still remains unknown.

The 2016 coming-of-age Academy award-winning film, *Moonlight*, deals with universal themes of identity, sexuality, family, and, most of all, masculinity. Through three stages of the protagonist’s life from a troubled, dysfunctional childhood, an angry adolescence, to adulthood the film addresses the negative aspects of masculinity, Black male identity and its interactions with sexual identity. *Moonlight* further explores the difficulties the protagonist faces with his own sexuality and identity, including the abuse he receives because of it. The film's premise gives a voice to the all too familiar issues that are present, yet exists silently in the Black community - the physical and emotional abuse many gay males receive as a result of identifying as gay.

Those men within the Black community that identify with the LGBTQ community would sadly, and rightly, say that there is oppression that takes place with respect to their sexual orientation in Black churches. To this, Dr. William L. Jeffries et al. quotes a research participant, saying, “...And that's why I had to get away from South Carolina. Because people down there are just so closed-minded... they just like to condemn you...And in the church! In Church, especially down there they love to throw the homosexuality thing in your face. That's why I go to a gay church. I don't have time for that. Because as soon as you step in a hetero-, so called heterosexual church, everybody looks at you. And everybody looks at you like you're not supposed to be

²⁶ Robert Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (San Francisco, CA: Black Scholar Press, 1982), 90.

there.”²⁷ With this religious oppression from within many of their religious organizations, coupled with the racial oppression they face as it relates to White society, and the cultural estrangement from their own community therein lies the harsh reality of their triple consciousness,²⁸ compounded with the reality of their triple oppression.

Dr. Horace L. Griffin provides a most grounded and pointed research addressing gay oppression in his book, *Their Own Receive Them Not*. To this he states, “This book points out many of the parallels between historical White Christian justifications for slavery and racial discrimination and present Black Christian justifications gay oppression (unjust exercise of power that denies gays equal treatment with heterosexuals.)”²⁹ It is within this dichotomy that we find yet another hypocrisy of Black churches, on one hand, as they oppose racial oppression, yet on the other, they themselves enforce religious doctrinal oppression of those of the LGBTQ community through teachings that their lifestyles are immoral.³⁰

In all honesty, homosexual’s presence in and throughout the Black community, and Black churches is not a new phenomenon. It has been around for ages. In his book, *Homophobia in the Black Church*, Anthony Stanford references the work of Tristan Cabello as he explores the history of Black gays and lesbians on the Southside of Chicago in his 2009 doctoral dissertation entitled, *Bronzeville in the Life: Urban Boundaries, Race and Homosexuality in Black Chicago*,

²⁷ William L. Jeffries, Brian Dodge, and Theo G. M. Sandfort, “Religion and Spirituality among Bisexual Black Men in the USA,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 10, no. 5 (June 1, 2008): 469, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050701877526>.

²⁸ W.E.B. Dubois argues in *The Soul of Black Folks*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3, that ‘the Negro’ abides in a world where he is afforded “no true self-consciousness” but rather is only able to see himself in the context of the other world. He coins this duality of African American identity, “double-consciousness.” He defines it by saying, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” Triple Consciousness is experienced by those that identify as Black in white society, gay in a heteronormative culture, and Christian with same-sex attractions. This results in a triple oppression in the context of racism, homophobia, and religious doctrinal oppression.

²⁹ Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, 7.

³⁰ Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, 7.

1935 - 1985. In his dissertation, Cabello argues not only the visibility of queers, but their acceptance from the turn of the century to the early 1980's on the Southside of Chicago.³¹ Stanford quotes Cabello by stating, 'On the streets, working - class African-American queers were also tolerated. For example, Lorenzo Banyard, a Cabin Inn drag entertainer, remembers riding street cars to the West Side, dressed in drag, without incident. Professional drag entertainers were indeed respected because of their relatively well-paying jobs, which often enable them to provide for their families' needs.'³² Because Cabello has only taken one segment of the Black community, and in particularly the Black LGBTQ community in Chicago, one can be misled into thinking that there was a perfect environment with which Black homosexuals could live during this time period. This is misleading in that, the gestalt has not been considered, and this acceptance was not the everyday occurrence or experience of the masses in the Black LGBTQ community across the country. To this Stanford states, "However, to my way of thinking, the treatment of Black LGBTs decades ago depicts a life of isolation, bias, and disparagement still suffered by Black LGBTs. In fact, the Black Culture cultural prejudice against LGBTs practiced then continues today as many Black LGBTs are forced to conceal their sexual identity in modern society to avoid being shamed by the Black community and church."³³ Regrettably, many of the Black men with same-sex attractions are not only shamed within the community, but in their places of worship as well.

In light of the fact that religion has historically played such an important role within the fabric of the Black community, it has a strong presence and role in shaping attitudes, beliefs and

³¹ Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church*, 77.

³² Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church*, 78.

³³ Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church*, 78.

everyday practices within the community. In *Role Flexing: How Community, Religion, and Family Shape the Experiences of Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men*, the authors state:

In this capacity, religion has often been identified as a source of homophobia. While rooted in biblical teachings, these negative attitudes toward same-sex behavior are often perpetuated in Black Churches and religious institutions. This stigma is frequently replicated and supported in other domains of these young men's lives, including their relationships with family, friends, and the larger African American community. Studies have found that Blacks consistently express more negative attitudes toward homosexuality and Black men engaging in same-sex behavior are more likely to experience disapproval from their families and friends than are their white counterparts.³⁴

Because of the fear of disapproval, many Black men with same-sex attractions remain silent about their sexual orientation, and keep their true identities a secret in both their social and religious communities.

When the issue is breached in the context of the Church, there is either an abusive atmosphere, or there is a silence that is deafening. There are churches that deal with the issue head-on and tend to be very judgmental in the manner in which it is treated. To this, Anthony Stanford states, "Though difficult for the Black community to accept, the reality is that the contagious scorn and repudiation toward homosexuals emanates from the community's cornerstone, the Black Church. This highlights an enormous failure, and as if to corroborate this exceptionally disheartening observation, the response I have received when reaching out to members of the Black clergy was mostly venomous, condemnatory, and disturbing. In almost every instance, it seemed the clergy member was attempting to justify the unfair treatment of homosexuals by using biblical scripture to support the abuse. Of course, I realize that this is not

³⁴ Alexandra B. Balaji, Alexandra M. Oster, Abigail H. Viall, James D. Heffelfinger, Leandro A. Mena, and Carlos A. Toledo, "Role Flexing: How Community, Religion, and Family Shape the Experiences of Young Black Men Who have Sex with Men," *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 26, no. 12 (Dec 1, 2012): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1089/apc.2012.0177>.

the genesis of the problem, nor does it reflect the position of the entirety of Black ministers.”³⁵

Stanford continues by further stating, “However, it is difficult to refute that this continues to be the position taken by Black ministers. As difficult as this is to accept, what most affects me well over a century since the end of slavery is the extent to which the stain of human bondage continues to affect the collective psyche of Blacks. This is an essential point because to comprehend slavery's lasting legacy, it is necessary to understand its pathology and diabolical genius.”³⁶ Gary David Comstock in *A Whosoever Church* further expounds on this by saying, “One person told me that rejection by the Black church is ‘especially devastating because this institution has been, and continues to be, the only place where we can take the real refuge from the racism we experience in the society.’”³⁷ Stanford and Comstock both acknowledge that the contagious scorn, rejection, and repudiation from Black ministers towards Black men with same-sex attractions resembles the same oppression, and human bondage faced by Blacks during slavery.

Over the past few decades there have been many works done by scholars addressing the issues and tensions of the intersections of race, religion, and sexuality. Within the last decade or so, works addressing issues facing Black men that identity with the LGBTQ community have flourished. My concluding analysis of the above material suggests that there are three distinct areas in which Black gay men that attend Black churches are oppressed. They are oppressed racially by society at large because of the color of their skin, they are oppressed socially by sectors of the Black community because of their sexual orientation, and lastly, they are oppressed

³⁵ Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church*, xix.

³⁶ Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church*, xix.

³⁷ Comstock, *A Whosoever Church*, 1.

religiously by theologically-driven homophobic Black churches because of their sexual orientation.

Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is arguably one of America's most noted and decorated leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement, from December, 1955 until his death in April 4, 1968. Widely regarded as America's preeminent advocate of nonviolence, under his leadership African Americans were able to achieve more racial equality in America than they had in the previous three and half centuries.³⁸

As an ordained minister, many of Dr. King's ideologies were birthed in the Church. In a like manner, as he transitioned to undertake racial inequality and larger issues of the Black community he was influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of the Church - in particular homophobia. This was manifested in 1960 when prominent minister and Harlem congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. threatened to spread a rumor that Dr. King and Bayard Rustin, one the co-founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were lovers. This pressured Dr. King into severing his friendship with Bayard Rustin, a member of his leadership team who was openly gay. Despite the significant contributions of Rustin, Powell's dissension to a gay man being so intricately involved in the movement caused a rift in the leadership. Ultimately, Rustin put in his letter of resignation and Dr. King elected not to stand up and support one of his strongest confidants.³⁹ Of course homophobia's roots go further than the Civil Rights Movement of 1955-1968, but Dr. King's experience is a strong example of how Black homophobia's prevalence in Black churches overflows into the Black community, and society at large. The experience of Dr. King lays the foundation for a deeper examination into Black

³⁸ "About Dr. King," The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/about-dr-king>.

³⁹ Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 229-230.

churches culture and how the church's attitude about homosexuality impacts their ability to engage in healthy, supportive relationships with men who identify with same-sex attractions.

It is apparent that there is a grave need for dialogue to begin to close the gap between those Black men that identify with the LGBTQ community and attend Black churches. There is a pink elephant in the room and neither side is taking action to resolve the issue at hand. Many of the congregations that are silent on the issue are filled with men facing the very same issue. And many of the congregations that are addressing the issue, are addressing it incorrectly. It is my hope that Black churches are engaged to call into question its views of homosexuality, and evolve by offering a new perspective and interpretation of scripture with respect to liberation from its current position on the matter.⁴⁰

Black Churches

Black churches have an important role as a spiritual center within the Black community. By providing spiritual, social, psychological preservation, and empowerment through some of the Black communities most troubling times, it has forged itself a reputation as the nucleus of the community. Although Black churches historically have been the cornerstone of the Black community by providing robust services to its members that they consider normative human beings, there are members that have same-sex attractions within the community that have not been served, possibly neglected, rejected, marginalized, and negatively impacted. I will address the fact that although there are varying views on theological topics amongst the seven historically Black denominations, based upon their church bylaws they all share in the belief that homosexuality is not God's design for humankind, which manifests itself in the mistreatment of

⁴⁰ Portions of the above section, The History of Homophobia in the Black Community pgs. 22-30, first appeared in my paper for a class, Derrick L. Wade, "Triple Consciousness, Triple Oppression," a paper presented for Concepts and Methods of Africana Studies, Claremont Graduate University, Spring 2017.

men with same-sex attractions. It is this mistreatment that this research calls into question, in that, it is contrary to the love which God has implored all believers to display to all.

There are a number of smaller communities within the confines of the Black community. As with all ethnic and racial groups, Blacks are a diverse ethnic group. For the purpose of this work, I define the community of Black churches, their congregants, and leaders, as the Christian institutions established after the Free African Society of 1787 and constituted the core of Black Christians and developed into the following seven historically Black denominations: (1) African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, (2) African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, (3) Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, (4) National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated (NBC), (5) National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA), (6) Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), and (7) Church of God in Christ (COGIC).⁴¹ These seven denominations within Black churches have differences in theology, ways of worship, music and liturgy. While all seven denominations share a commitment to serve the Black community, they also share a strong theological stance on homosexuality.

History of Black Churches and Black Community

There is a strong historical connection between the Black community and churches in the U.S. that were birthed through slavery and during the Eighteenth Century.⁴² Scholars such as W.E.B Dubois have resounded the fact that Black churches were one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery.⁴³ While slaves were allowed to worship alongside their masters, they still held their own independent services to commune with one another as an

⁴¹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1.

⁴² Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1.

⁴³ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 7.

expression of their liberation and freedom from slavery.⁴⁴ Slaves would secretly hold their own independent worship services in the backwoods of the plantations, and or in their slave quarters.⁴⁵ This liberation and freedom was further displayed by the manner in which they worshipped, and sang spirituals and hymns.

Franklin Frazier coined these secret worship gatherings as the “invisible institution,”⁴⁶ making churches one of the first institutions formed by slaves. This invisible institution would lay a foundation for subsequent institutions that would develop.

These initial Black churches provided a closely united spirituality that allowed slaves to not only practice the Christian faith, but empowered them to make it their own.⁴⁷ Slaves made this their own by reinstating the Churches’ worth and a belief in human dignity and opposed the racist messages of the master class.⁴⁸ Frazier suggests, “The Negro slave found in Christianity a theology and a new orientation towards the world at large and in doing so he adapted the Christian religion to his psychological and social needs. One of the best sources of information on the way the Negro adapted Christianity to his peculiar psychological and social needs is to be found in the great body of sacred folk music known as the ‘Negro Spirituals.’”⁴⁹

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham suggests, “In decades following Reconstruction, the church’s autonomy and financial strength made it the most logical institution for the pursuit of racial self-help. It functioned not only as the house of worship but as an agency of social control,

⁴⁴ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 4.

⁴⁵ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 8.

⁴⁶ E. Frazier Franklin, *The Negro Church in America*, first edition (New York, NY: Schocken, 1963), 41-59.

⁴⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “The Black Church: A Gender Perspective,” in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, eds. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 191.

⁴⁸ Higginbotham, “The Black Church: A Gender Perspective,” 191.

⁴⁹ Franklin, *The Negro Church in America*, 12.

forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation and arena for the development and assertion of leadership.”⁵⁰

From slavery to the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, religious organizations mobilized grassroots movements in the Black community. As one of the oldest institutions in the Black community, Black churches serve as its nucleus and most influential establishment.⁵¹ Due to racial segregation, Blacks were not allowed access to public facilities and other public accommodations. For Blacks, over time the Church became a representation of the public square. The Church provided a limited sense of safety and possibility. During this time of change, institutions such as schools, newspapers, and civic organizations were birthed with the sole purpose of serving the Black community.

As the catalyst for numerous social and political movements, Black churches have been the cornerstone of most of the racial justice concerns of the Black community. In his seminal work, *The Soul of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Dubois speaks to this by stating, “The Negro church of to-day [*sic*] is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.”⁵² The Negro church would later become referred to as the “Black Church” in the late 1960s.⁵³ By providing a spiritual center, Black churches and religious organizations alike have provided spiritual, social, psychological preservation, and empowerment with their leadership and guidance through many of the Black communities’ trying and most difficult times.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Higginbotham, “The Black Church: A Gender Perspective,” 191.

⁵¹ Ward, “Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church,” 495.

⁵² W.E.B Du Bois, *Writings / W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1986), 495.

⁵³ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 1.

⁵⁴ Robert L. Miller, “African American Churches at the Crossroads of AIDS,” *Focus: A Guide to Aids Research and Counseling*, 16, no. 10 (2001), 1.

Black Churches Shared Theological Belief on Homosexuality

Despite all seven denominations sharing a commitment to serve the Black community, there are those within the community that often go unserved. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) Statement on the Faith in Human Rights Declaration states, “The Church of God in Christ consistently, utterly rejects and uncompromisingly denounces the practice of homosexuality. Our biblical interpretation of the sanctity of marriage as a sacred relationship between a man and a woman uncompromisingly views homosexual relationships as a contradiction and violation of the biblical teaching on marriage and are strongly condemned in the scriptures.”⁵⁵ The other denominations have similar constitutional declarations about homosexuality. Each denomination has utilized their bylaws to shape how they address homosexuality in sermons, discipleship, counseling, and marriage. The two practices most commonly used by Black churches in response to individuals who acknowledge homosexuality as their sexual identity is to: (1) pray the gay away, and (2) encourage spiritual counseling to develop strategies for abstaining from same-sex physical relationships.⁵⁶

Black church's' attitude towards and approach to interacting with individuals who identify as homosexual has often been defined as homophobic.⁵⁷ However, leaders within Black churches have expressed that their approach to homosexuality is not rooted in hate or fear, but rather developed from a Biblical paradigm of sin.⁵⁸ Black Church leaders suggests their outlook

⁵⁵ The Office of the Presiding Bishop, "Statement on the Faith in Human Rights Declaration: Same-Sex Marriage and Homosexuality," (Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ, Inc., 2008), 7.

⁵⁶ Robert L. Miller, Jr., *What is the Role of the Black Church for Black Gay Men and HIV Prevention?*, (San Francisco, CA: University of California San Francisco Center for Aids Prevention Studies , 2013), 2, <https://prevention.ucsf.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/BlackchurchandgaymenFSdraft3.pdf>; Krista McQueeney, “‘We are God's Children, Y'all’: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian- and Gay- Affirming Congregations,” *Social Problems*, 56, no. 1 (February 2009): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2009.56.1.151>.

⁵⁷ Roger A. Sneed, *Representations of Homosexuality: Black Liberation Theology and Cultural Criticism* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89.

⁵⁸ The Office of the Presiding Bishop, "Statement on the Faith," 7.

on homosexuality is to “hate the sin, but not the sinner.”⁵⁹ This misconstrued Biblical paradigm on homosexuality shapes the way the church teaches individuals how to address same-sex attractions whether it is one’s personal reality or if they have family, friends or coworkers who are not heterosexual.

Homosexual Leadership in Black Churches

The religious views engrained in Black churches present a tremendous conflict for African Americans who are heavily involved in church ministry, and have same-sex attractions. Men with same-sex attractions can be found serving throughout various ministries of Black churches, many of which are in key positions, and often consider the backbones of the ministry.⁶⁰ Although Black churches denounce same-sex attractions, Black males with same-sex attractions are often permitted to be very involved in Church leadership roles as pastors, deacons, teachers, and head of the music department, etc. Dr. Victor Anderson, the Oberlin Theological School Professor of Ethics and Society at the Vanderbilt Divinity School, and Professor in the Program in African-American and Diaspora Studies and Religious Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, speaks to this by stating, “...Black churches constitute a surrogate world that may tacitly ‘accept’ Black gays and lesbians into their fellowship on the basis of their being silent regarding their sexuality while their gifts and talents are exploited by the churches in their roles as musicians, choir leaders, ushers, and teachers of youth.”⁶¹

Although there is a long history of men who have identified as same-sex loving and deeply committed to their faith in Jesus Christ when and/or if their sexuality is made public they have often been ostracized or severely chastened for their sexual orientation. For example,

⁵⁹ Pamela Valera, and Tonya Taylor, “‘Hating the Sin but Not the Sinner’: A Study about Heterosexism and Religious Experiences among Black Men,” *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 1 (Jan, 2011): 115.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, 184.

⁶¹ Anderson, “The Black Church and the Curious Body,” 298.

Anthony Charles Williams, II, known by his stage name B. Slade is a former Pastor and former gospel recording artist (also known as Tonex) who was ostracized after a television interview with gospel colleague, Lexi. During the interview which aired on The Word Network, a gospel channel, the then Tonex disclosed that he believed God honors “same-sex covenants” and implied that the church so do the same.⁶² Within hours of the interview airing concert dates and speaking engagements began to be cancelled.

Gay Pastors in Black Churches

Homosexuality within the ranks of Pastors in Black churches have been a controversial issue for decades. The late Bishop Eddie Long, emerged as a leading voice in Black churches between 1987-2017 when he grew his ministry, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in DeKalb County, Georgia from 300 to 25,000 members. Prominent Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H. W. Bush and Jimmy Carter all visited Bishop Long's church Bishop Long's international acclaim grew despite numerous public stances against homosexuality. During his thirty years as a pastor, Bishop Long delivered several homophobic messages, participated in several rallies and marches against gay marriage, all which garnered him a reputation in the Black community as having a hard stance on homosexuality.⁶³

However, the anti-homosexual stance that Bishop Long declared for decades was dramatically questioned in 2010 when four young men waged accusations against him alleging he used pastoral influence to coerce them into sexual relationships with him. The controversy was exacerbated when Bishop Long settled the lawsuit in the Georgia court by paying six-figure

⁶² Kelefa Sanneh, "Revelations," *The New Yorker*, February 8, 2010, accessed August 10, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/02/08/revelations-3>.

⁶³ Robbie Brown and James C. McKinley, "Sex Scandal Threatens a Georgia Pastor's Empire," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2010, accessed August 10, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/26/us/26pastor.html>.

settlements to each of the accusers.⁶⁴ When the sexual identity of a pastor in one the seven largest denominations of Black churches is questioned and it is never publicly addressed, it presents confusion in the church due to the Biblical constitution outlined in the church's bylaws.

While Bishop Long's circumstances raised questions until his death in 2017, other Black Pastors have openly addressed their sexual identity and faced consequences. In April of 2017, Rev. Cedrick Bridgeforth, former pastor of the Santa Ana United Methodist Church was forced to step down by his denomination after acknowledging he was a gay man. Rev. Bridgeforth took "voluntary leave of absence" after what has been coined as a "tumultuous year." Rev. Bridgeforth disavow his bishop candidacy because of the backlash and religious oppression he experienced due to his sexual orientation.⁶⁵ The response to Rev. Bridgeforth is common not only for Black Pastors, but this religious oppression is also for Black men with same-sex attractions in the pews of Black churches.

Theologically-Driven Homophobia and Religious Oppression of Black Men with Same-Sex Attractions within Black Churches

By delving into the presence of theologically-driven homophobia of some within Black churches towards men that identify with same-sex attractions, I will address the existence of homophobia historically, and how it continues to exist in Black churches and the Black community.

Religious oppression with men who have same-sex attractions is likened to racial oppression faced by minorities throughout history. Within Black churches religious oppression is often viewed as homophobia by those in the church with same-sex attractions. How is this

⁶⁴ Christian Boone, "Eddie Long Case Officially Dismissed," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 24, 2011, accessed August 10, 2017, <http://www.ajc.com/news/local/eddie-long-case-officially-dismissed/qmbu3JdiggYLFqnwlaBkYO/>.

⁶⁵ Gabriel S. Roman, "A Gay Pastor Leaves His Santa Ana Flock, Exposing the United Methodist Church's LGBT Rift," accessed August 22, 2017, <http://www.ocweekly.com/news/a-gay-pastor-leaves-his-santa-ana-flock-exposing-the-united-methodist-churchs-lgbt-rift-8217641>.

religious oppression and homophobia manifested? In the late 1960s psychologist George Weinberg described the term, *homophobia*, by outlining three constructs. Those constructs are, “sexual stigma (the shared knowledge of society’s negative regard for any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community), heterosexism (the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma), and sexual prejudice (individuals’ negative attitudes based on sexual orientation).”⁶⁶

Therefore, I suggest religious oppression of same-sex attractions within Black churches commonly shows up in two ways - statements from preachers and those within the Gospel Music industry.

Homophobia from the Pulpit

The pulpit has served as a place to spread homophobic views. The late Rev. E.V. Hill, former Pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in South-Central Los Angeles, CA and special advisor to former Mayor Richard Riordan, had a long history of using his pulpit to deliver homophobic rhetoric.⁶⁷ In 1981, he turned down an appointment as the Chairmen of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission by the then sitting President Ronald Reagan. His reasoning was, “I just don’t think I am the man for the job. I have taken a very strong stance against the ERA in its present form and I have taken a very strong stance against homosexuality as a lifestyle. And these are the kinds of cases which the commission would be hearing.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Gregory M. Herek, "Beyond 'Homophobia': Thinking about Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy: Journal of NSRC* 1, no. 2 (Apr, 2004): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1525/srsp.2004.1.2.6>.

⁶⁷ Marc Lacey, "Riordan's South-Central Adviser Isn't Preaching to the Choir: Politics: Baptist Minister E.V. Hill has made His Mark by Taking a Contrarian, Conservative View. Even Ardent Liberals Admire His Commitment to the Community," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1993, accessed August 10, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-07-25/local/me-16720_1_baptist-minister.

⁶⁸ James H. Cleaver, "E. V. Hill Rejects Reagan Offer," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 27, 1981, accessed August 10, 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:bsc:&rft_dat=xri:bsc:rec:newspaper:HNP_77902_19810827_0003.

E.V. Hill is just one in a long history of preachers speaking out against homosexuality. Throughout time, the comments made by the vast majority of Black Church ministers regarding men with same-sex attractions are either a message of fire and brimstone - which means homosexuals are damned to hell, or electing a deafening silence on the matter. Dr. Horace L. Griffin states in his book, *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*:

Whereas there is a diversity of African American religious views on some issues, such as women in ministry, social activism, evangelism, and interpretation of scripture, in the area of sexuality, and homosexuality, in particular, Black congregants do not show much variance. A significant number of Black church leaders have responded to this issue in reactionary ways by strongly opposing gay marriage without a measured discussion of the larger issue of homosexuality. All Black denominations hold the view that homosexuality is immoral. While a number of white mainline denominations hold a similar view, these communions have engaged the issue at their conventions for decades and show much greater variance.⁶⁹

Many Clergy conceptualize homosexuality as being in direct opposition of that which God created, and their religious tradition. With sermons filled with condemnation and denigration, many men and women of the cloth clearly show their rejection of those with same-sex attractions, and those that participate in same-sex behaviors.⁷⁰ Dr. Angelique C. Harris, a professor at Marquette University in the Social and Cultural Sciences Department of the Helen Way Killinger College of Arts and Sciences, provides an exemplar of the long history on homophobia from the pulpit in Black churches in her work, *Homosexuality and the Black Church*. Dr. Harris states:

In the fall of 1929, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of one of the best known Black churches in the United States, Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, launched a campaign against homosexuality and other “vices” in the African American community. In his 1939 autobiography, Powell claimed that his motivation for this campaign was to

⁶⁹ Griffin, *Their Own Receive Them Not*, 6.

⁷⁰ Robert L. Miller, Jr., "Legacy Denied: African American Gay Men, AIDS, and the Black Church," *Social Work* 52, no. 1 (Jan, 2007): 52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/52.1.51>.
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/nasw/sw/2007/00000052/00000001/art00006>.

protect the African American family. According to Powell, homosexuality was an alarming social trend that greatly threatened American families with men leaving their spouses for other men, and women choosing to never marry and instead engaging in relationships with other women. Powell wrote, "Why did I preach against homosexuality and all manner of sexual perversions? Because, as every informed person knows, these sins are on the increase and are threatening to eat the vitals out of America."⁷¹

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. would later continue to declare his father's position that homosexuality is immoral and sinful with the misuse of scripture to justify his homophobic views.

Homophobia within Gospel Music Industry

The religious oppression of same-sex attractions extends beyond the pulpit and has involved high profile Gospel Music artists such as Kim Burrell, and Angie and Debbie Winans who are amongst a list of many well-known Black men and women of the cloth who have condemned those with same-sex attractions. These artists have expressed homophobic doctrine when they sing at churches, conduct interviews, or travel for concert engagements. In 2016, Pastor and award-winning Gospel artist, Kim Burrell gave a sermon in which she stated, "...anybody that's filled with the homosexual spirit, beg God to free you. If you play with it in 2017 it will kill you. If you play with it in God's House in 2017 you'll die from it."⁷² The reach of Kim Burrell's comments were amplified because she is well-known and respected in Gospel and secular music communities with performances and associations including Whitney Houston, The Winans, CeCe Winans, Brandy, Stevie Wonder, Beyoncé, Sam Smith, and Amy Winehouse, to name a few. Most recently, Pastor Burrell recorded the song "I See a Victory," produced by mega producer Pharrell Williams for the 2016 motion picture *Hidden Figures*' soundtrack.

⁷¹ Angelique C. Harris, "Homosexuality and the Black Church," *The Journal of African American History* 93, no. 2 (2008): 262.

⁷² Clay Cane, "What Kim Burrell's Rant Reveals," *CNN*, January 3, 2017, accessed August 10, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/03/opinions/what-kim-burrell-comments-reveal-cane/index.html>.

Burrell's homophobic comments was the headline of an article in the January 3, 2017, CNN.com Opinion section.⁷³

This type of anti-gay rhetoric is not new for gospel artists nor to gospel music for that matter. In 1997, Angie and Debbie Winans of the famed Winans Family,⁷⁴ release a song entitled, "Not Natural."⁷⁵ The lyrics include, "...There were people celebrating and congratulating, the new addition to the gay community, I was vexed in the spirit, and I began to write this song, it may be cold but let the truth be told, I'm here to let you know, It's not natural."⁷⁶

The gospel duo wrote and recorded the song after viewing an episode of ABC-TV's sitcom "Ellen" in which the main character, portrayed by comedian Ellen DeGeneres, shares that she is lesbian. Although the song received criticism, spurred protest, and boycotts from Gospel radio, and Black congregations Angie and Debbie maintained their stance on the song.

The homophobia declared by Gospel artists has a greater influence on anti-gay attitudes because these artists are often revered and present a major sexual identity challenge for individuals who have same-sex attractions and/or are in same-sex relationships. Whether it is homophobia from the pulpit or in Gospel music the oppression is easily identifiable. Same-sex attractions have been regarded as "demonic," "sinful," "unnatural," and "abnormal" to name a few.

Men who identify with having same-sex attractions in Black churches are looked upon as having made the decision to give in to these sexual desires that are often frowned upon by the

⁷³ Cane, "What Kim Burrell's Rant Reveals."

⁷⁴ The Winans Family is considered by many to be the first family of gospel music.

⁷⁵ Jim Patterson, "Winans Sisters Stand Behind Anti-Gay Song," *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), October 30, 1997, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/565690905?accountid=35804>.

⁷⁶ Religion News Service, "Song's Anti-Gay Stance Spurs Protests, Boycotts," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1997. <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/oct/25/local/me-46435>.

Church. Dr. E. Patrick Johnson sheds some light on the matter by stating, “The pathologizing of homosexuality as “unnatural” and “ungodly” creates a hostile, oppressive, and homophobic environment for gays and lesbians- an environment that is, according to Christian doctrine, supposed to foster community and acceptance through Christ.”⁷⁷ Instead of acceptance, noted scholar, Michael Eric Dyson suggests, that homosexual behaviors often fall victim to blanketed theological attack, and as a result Black churches, “an institution that has been at the heart of Black emancipation, refuses to unlock the oppressive closet for gays and lesbians.”⁷⁸ Due to the importance of religion amongst Blacks, theologically-driven homophobia is amplified when condemnation of same-sex behaviors is present through homophobic messages in sermons and songs by individuals who are held in high regard in Black churches. Its negative impact is felt on a plethora of levels for those who identify with same-sex attractions, and benefits of the social environment of the Church are thusly diminished.⁷⁹

Conclusion

From the pulpit, to the choir, to the church leadership, those that either openly or closetedly identify with the LGBTQ community face unwelcoming and unaccepting environments within Black churches. Almost ninety years after Dr. Adam Clayton Powell Sr. ’s statement regarding homosexuals, Black churches still have not eradicated the issue of homophobia in the context of theologically-driven homophobic attitudes from church leaders and

⁷⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, “Feeling the Spirit in the Dark,” in *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, ed. Delroy Constantine-Simms, first edition (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books, 2001), 96.

⁷⁸ Michael Eric Dyson, *Race Rules* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1996), 105.

⁷⁹ Katherine Quinn, Julia Dickson-Gomez, and Jeffrey A. Kelly, “The Role of the Black Church in the Lives of Young Black Men Who have Sex with Men,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 18, no. 5 (May 3, 2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1091509>; The above sections, *The Black Church’s Shared Theological Belief on Homosexuality and Theologically-Driven Homophobia and Religious Oppression of Black Men with Same-Sex Attractions within Black Churches* pgs. 3-11, first appeared in my paper for a class, Derrick L. Wade, “The Black Church and Homophobia,” paper presented for Sexuality and Religion, Claremont Graduate University, Summer 2017.

congregation members. In the context of the current social climate, if Black churches are to stay relevant by meeting the needs of the people, they must address the inbred issues they face with respect to its attitudes and views towards men with same-sex attractions. Black churches must take ownership of the role it must play in reconciling the tension in the lives of men with same-sex attractions with respect to their religious and sexual identities. The Church must serve as a safe haven for all within the community. As one of the oldest institutions in the Black community and arguably its cornerstone, in order for Black churches to continue serving as its nucleus and most influential establishment,⁸⁰ it must begin serving all of its members regardless of their sexual orientation. It is then and only then that the love which God has implored all believers to display can be shown. This display of God's love will be the catalyst to a discourse of truth in love and His redemptive power.

The imperative of Black churches is to respond to the needs of men with same-sex attractions and eradicate homophobia. This is addressed by Black churches applying Dr. Richard Osmer's third task, the normative task, which asks, 'What ought to be going on?'⁸¹ This issue is address at length in Chapter Four.

⁸⁰ Ward, "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church," 495.

⁸¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

CHAPTER 3

Projection and Internalization of Homophobia in Black Churches and its Impact

The previous chapter concluded that gays and lesbians face unwelcoming and unaccepting environments, when, as Dr. E. Patrick Johnson states, homosexuality is characterized as "unnatural" and "ungodly." This however, is in opposition to what Christian doctrine holds, that being in Christian environments ought to "foster community and acceptance."⁸² Dr. Johnson's statement concerning the hostile environment towards homosexuality and Dr. Katherine Quinn and Dr. Julia Dickson-Gomez research findings that 90 percent of young Black men who have sex with men (MSM) who believe their parents would respond unfavorably to their same-sex experiences lead to what Dr. David M. Barnes and Dr. Ilan H. Meyer describe as Internalized Homophobia (IH) among Black men with same-sex attractions.⁸³

This chapter explores Internalized Homophobia as it relates to its impact socially, and psychologically on Black men with same-sex attractions. The first section defines Internalized Homophobia and the social effects religious affiliations have on its manifestation. The second section explores three mental stressors related to religion and sexual orientation that contribute to Internalized Homophobia. Lastly, the third section focuses on how Internalized Homophobia gives rise to personality confusion, enhances conflicts - specifically - sexual identity vs. spiritual identity, and gives rise to men with same-sex attractions creating alternate personalities.

⁸² Johnson, "Feeling the Spirit in the Dark," 96.

⁸³ Quinn and Dickson-Gomez, *Homonegativity, Religiosity, and the Intersecting Identities*, 51; David M. Barnes and Ilan H. Meyer, "Religious Affiliation, Internalized Homophobia, and Mental Health in Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 82, no. 4 (2012): 506, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2012.01185.x>.

Internalized Homophobia and Religious Affiliation

The exact definition of Internalized Homophobia varies amongst therapists. Nonetheless, it generally refers to the psychological experiences of projection and internalization in men with same-sex attractions and their effects which are cultivated by the negative stereotypes a person with same-sex attractions are subjected to in society.⁸⁴ For African American men with same-sex attractions, these negative stereotypes are often birthed in African American communities in general, and Black churches in particular. The pathologizing of homosexuality has been perpetuated by the theologically-driven homophobic environments within Black churches. These theologically-driven homophobic environments, within Black congregations, have adversely impacted those who identify as having same-sex attractions. The exposure to non-welcoming religious settings, and negative attitudes associated with their sexual orientation, oftentimes creates a conflict of spiritual and sexual identity within men with same-sex attractions. As a direct result, these men ultimately internalize antihomosexual bias views in their psyche which is known as a form of Internalized Homophobia.⁸⁵ Dr. Alan K. Malyon suggests, “the socialization of the incipient homosexual individual nearly always involves an internalization of the mythology and opprobrium which characterize current social attitudes toward homosexuality.”⁸⁶ Dr. Malyon’s view of internalized homophobia is birthed out of a variation of psychoanalytic theory. He suggests that object relations are catalysts through which the process of introjection causes harmful homophobic views and beliefs to be replicated in and incorporated in one’s view

⁸⁴ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald and Kandice L. Grossman, *Sociology of Sexualities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017), 167.

⁸⁵ Barnes and Meyer. “Religious Affiliation, Internalized Homophobia,” 506; David J. Allen and Terry Oleson, “Shame and Internalized Homophobia in Gay Men,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 37, no. 3 (May 21, 1999): 33, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v37n03_03.

⁸⁶ Alan K. Malyon, “Psychotherapeutic Implications of Internalized Homophobia in Gay Men,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 7, no. 2–3 (June 5, 1982): 60, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v07n02_08.

of themselves.⁸⁷ For young males and males with same-sex attractions that have grown up in non-welcoming Black congregations and religious settings, theologically-driven homophobic messages can play an important role in their socialization into homophobic attitudes and stigma. The longer the period of exposure is to the non-welcoming religious setting, the greater its impact on nurturing and supporting internalized homophobia in those individuals.

Describing Internalized Homophobia

Internalized Homophobia generally refers to the psychological experiences of projection and internalization in men with same-sex attractions and their effects which are cultivated by the negative stereotypes a person with same-sex attractions are subjected to in society.⁸⁸

The psychosexual development as well as the current mental functioning of a person with same-sex attractions have correlations to the concept of Internalized Homophobia. Dr. Richard Friedman and Dr. Jennifer Downey suggested, a person's identity is shaped, and impacted by their integration into specific social groups. These social groups are based upon family, race, religion, and sexual orientation all of which provide communities with which one can identify, and ultimately embracing their certain attitudes and values. When these groups attitudes and values are internalized they contribute to the sense of one's identity. If the group's views are of a negative nature, the internalized view of that person's identity is shaped with a negative slant.⁸⁹

Identification with the aggressor is an integral part of the psychological process that leads to Internalized Homophobia.⁹⁰ This is a common mental mechanism found in victims of abuse.

⁸⁷ Allen and Oleson, "Shame and Internalized Homophobia in Gay Men," 34.

⁸⁸ Fitzgerald and Grossman, *Sociology of Sexualities*, 167.

⁸⁹ Richard Friedman and Jennifer Downey, "Internalized Homophobia and the Negative Therapeutic Reaction," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 23, no.1 (Spring 1995): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1521/jaap.1.1995.23.1.99>.

⁹⁰ Friedman and Downey, *Internalized Homophobia and the Negative Therapeutic Reaction*, 100.

The victim introjects the negative view of himself that has been projected upon him. As a result, the victim often experiences a devaluation of self, internal conflicts, and low self-esteem.

This includes the belief previously highlighted by 90 percent of Black men ages 16-21, that their parents would have negative responses to discovering that they are gay or bisexual. Furthermore, "...fewer than 2 % of Black MSM report being open about their sexual identity at all times."⁹¹ To avoid the negative responses, and the potential of disappointing their parents these men seldom disclose their sexual orientation and live with the anxiety of it being discovered.

Health and Social Effects of Religious Affiliation: A Blessing and a Curse

Research has linked strong religious belief systems to numerous social as well as health benefits. These benefits include improved mental and physical health, an increase in quality of life, and life satisfaction.⁹² Scholars in the field of gerontological health research, for example, consider religion to be an important aspect of physical, mental, and emotional well-being.⁹³ Despite the positive mental and physical outcomes, Dr. Christopher G. Ellison and Dr. Jeffrey S. Levin highlight several negative outcomes tied to Black men with same-sex attractions and the church. In *The Role of the Black Church in the Lives of Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men*, researchers examined the roles of Black congregations and congregants in the lives of men with same-sex attractions and how they balanced the tension between their spiritual and sexual identities. Their research found that Black churches rank "among the most important institutions in the Black Community, offering numerous spiritual, social, and health benefits. Yet, the presence of homonegativity in many Black churches may mitigate those effects for gay Black

⁹¹ Quinn and Dickson-Gomez, *Homonegativity, Religiosity, and the Intersecting Identities*, 51.

⁹² Christopher G. Ellison and Jeffrey S. Levin, "The Religion-Health Connection: Evidence, Theory, and Future Directions," *Health Education & Behavior* 25, no. 6 (December 1, 1998): 703, <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819802500603>.

⁹³ J. S. Levin, L. M. Chatters, and R. J. Taylor, "Religious Effects on Health Status and Life Satisfaction among Black Americans," *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 50, no. 3 (May 1995): S154-163.

youth.”⁹⁴ Due to a strong presence of homonegativity, negative beliefs, stigmas and preponderance of theologically-driven homophobic messages, the social and health benefits of being associated with a Black church are diminished for men with same-sex attractions. Homonegativity and homophobic messages are in the church bylaws, thematic material in sermons, and quite often vigorously referenced in Bible study classes suggesting God's desire for humankind is heterosexual relationships. These negative opinions and messages of denigration become the catalyst for Internalized Homophobia and difficulties with one's acceptance of their sexual identity.⁹⁵ This study further supports the construct that negative views of one's sexual identity, particularly those with same-sex attractions indirectly serves as a catalyst to the connection of stressors to mental health outcomes.

Mental Stressors that Contribute to Internalized Homophobia

Research with a focus on the emotional and psychological needs of persons with same-sex attractions has been on the increase in recent years.⁹⁶ Dr. Matthew J. L. Page, Dr. Kristin M. Lindahl, and Dr. Neena M. Malik in their work, *The Role of Religion and Stress in Sexual Identity and Mental Health Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth* suggest, “While many LGB youth successfully manage adolescent challenges, some may be at risk for a variety of mental health concerns. Many LGB individuals experience stressors that are unique to their population, while often having limited access to protective factors and resources (Saewyc, 2011).”⁹⁷ In particular, there are three applicable stressors that researchers have found that contribute to the mental health concerns of individuals with same-sex attractions that have

⁹⁴ Quinn, Dickson-Gomez, and Kelly, “The Role of the Black Church,” 524.

⁹⁵ Matthew J. L. Page, Kristin M. Lindahl, and Neena M. Malik, “The Role of Religion and Stress in Sexual Identity and Mental Health Among LGB Youth,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 2013), 665, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12025>.

⁹⁶ Page, Lindahl, and Malik, “The Role of Religion and Stress in Sexual Identity,” 665.

⁹⁷ Page, Lindahl, and Malik, “The Role of Religion and Stress in Sexual Identity,” 665.

affiliations with non-welcoming Black congregations: minority stress, religious stress, and gay-related stress.⁹⁸ These stresses are discussed below. Therefore, when the religious organization with which they are affiliated does not provide a place of relief from the wiles of the world, they face increased gay-related stress.

Minority Stress

The first stressor facing Black males with same-sex attractions is *minority stress*. The fundamental concepts of “phobia, heterosexism, and homonegativity” have been combined into what recent research has termed, *minority stress*.⁹⁹ Albeit there is no solidarity with respect to the specificity of the stress processes which impact persons with same-sex attractions, a minority stress model can be a construction by gleaning from psychological theory, stress literature, and research on health of those within LGB populations. To this Dr. Ilan H. Meyer states:

One elaboration of social stress theory may be referred to as *minority stress* to distinguish the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position. The foundation for a model of minority stress is not found in one theory, nor is the term *minority stress* commonly used. Rather, a minority stress model is inferred from several sociological and social psychological theories. Relevant theories discuss the adverse effect of social conditions, such as prejudice and stigma, on the lives of affected individuals and groups (e.g., Allport, 1954; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984; Link & Phelan, 2001).¹⁰⁰

Stressors are experienced by all humans on a daily basis, however, those members of minority groups (inclusive of individuals with same-sex attractions) encounter an abundant number of stressors which can impact psychological functioning and have adverse mental health

⁹⁸ Michael Shelton, *Fundamentals of LGBT Substance Use Disorders: Multiple Identities, Multiple Challenges* (New York, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2017), 34; Page, Lindahl, and Malik, "The Role of Religion and Stress in Sexual Identity," 665.

⁹⁹ Shelton, *Fundamentals of LGBT Substance Use Disorders*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Ilan H. Meyer, "Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence." *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 1, no. S (August 2013): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1037/2329-0382.1.S.3>.

outcomes.¹⁰¹ With origins from institutions, social interactions and society in general, minority stress is both chronic and socially based.¹⁰²

Religious Stress

The second stressor facing Black males with same-sex attractions within non-welcoming Black congregations is *religious stress*. Within the study, *The Role of Religion and Stress in Sexual Identity and Mental Health Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth*, the research addressed the difficulty and conflict that youth with same-sex attractions faced with navigating between their sexual identity and their religious or spiritual beliefs. When discussing non-welcoming religious affiliations as a stressor, Dr. David M. Barnes and Dr. Ilan H. Meyer refer to Internalized Homophobia as, “the LGB person’s internalization of society’s negative attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality and directing these attitudes toward one’s self. Because most anti-gay attitudes are learned through normal socialization in our society, Internalized Homophobia can be a particularly insidious stressor.”¹⁰³ In heteronormal persons, a religious affiliation has been associated with positive psychosocial outcomes, however, those with same-sex attractions may feel a sense of rejection and in turn discontinue fellowship, and/or leave the religion.

Gay-Related Stress

The third stressor facing Black males with same-sex attractions is *gay-related stress*, which references the unique stressors one may experience in connection with their sexual orientation. These unique stressors appear in a myriad of ways, whether through negative family reactions in response to one's sexual orientation, or experiences of hostility and/or victimization.

¹⁰¹ Shelton, *Fundamentals of LGBT Substance Use Disorders*, 35.

¹⁰² Shelton, *Fundamentals of LGBT Substance Use Disorders*, 35.

¹⁰³ Barnes and Meyer, "Religious Affiliation, Internalized Homophobia," 506.

In addition, researchers say Internalized Homophobia can be correlated with a number of psychological and mental health issues, including depression, emotional distress, shame, substance abuse, dangerous sexual behaviors, and suicide attempts. All of these psychological and mental issues are attributable to gay-related stressors.¹⁰⁴ As a result of stressors related to being gay, some men are less likely to have an openness regarding their sexual orientation. Due to the stereotypes associated with having same-sex attractions many men live double lives to circumvent the stigma associated with their sexual orientation.

Internalized Homophobia and Dual Identities

Social Psychologist, Dr. Leon Festinger argues in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, that where there is a persistence of inconsistencies in one's life that they are unable to explain away or rationalizing, the inconsistency continues to exist. Dr. Festinger states, “Under such circumstances - that is, in the presence of an inconsistency - there is psychological discomfort.”¹⁰⁵

For the Black male that has found meaning within his involvement in, and attendance in church, he is forced to navigate through the tensions of his spiritual identity and his sexual identity. This tension often forces men to compartmentalize their spiritual identity and sexual one, and lead “double lives.”

Spiritual Identity vs. Sexual Identity for Black Gay Men

¹⁰⁴ Fitzgerald and Grossman, *Sociology of Sexualities*, 167; Robin J. Lewis, Valerian J. Derlega, Jessica L. Griffin, and Alison C. Krowinski. “Stressors for Gay Men and Lesbians: Life Stress, Gay-Related Stress, Stigma Consciousness, and Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 22, no. 6 (December 1, 2003): 718, <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.22.6.716.22932>; Ritch C. Savin-Williams and Geoffrey L. Ream, “Suicide Attempts Among Sexual-Minority Male Youth,” *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 32, no. 4 (November 1, 2003): 509, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15374424JCCP3204_3.

¹⁰⁵ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 2.

The quandary Black men with same-sex attractions in Black churches are often faced with is to embrace their sexual attractions and identify sexually as an openly gay man, versus embracing a spiritual identity often rooted in the teachings that "God hates gays" or "God hates homosexuality." For Black men with same-sex attractions, the choice between giving up same-sex attractions or giving up participating in Black churches is not a simple choice. Thus, they elect to create an alternate option - creating a *dual identity*. Many of these men are forced to negotiate negative homophobic messages from Black churches about sexuality while still embracing and practicing their faith. Doctrinal teachings in Black churches challenge them to choose between their love of God, the Biblical tenets that have been inextricably woven into the fabric of their lives since childhood, and who they believe they are innately.¹⁰⁶ This conflict of beliefs impacts some men with same-sex attractions by subjecting them to feelings of worthlessness, and depression. In some cases, to avoid the conflicts, stigmas and ridicule from the church associated with same-sex attractions and sexual activities, these men lead "double lives." This double life or "down low" life would involve living as a heterosexual man while at church or religious surrounds, and maintaining a gay life outside of those surroundings.

In his article, "*Still Looking for My Jonathan*": *Gay Black Men's Management of Religious and Sexual Identity Conflicts*, Dr. Richard N. Pitt conducted research on as he describes, "homosexual Black men who are heavily involved in fundamentalist African American Churches. These men describe themselves as 'out as same-sex loving individuals' even though the messages preached by their church leaders and the doctrines of their churches

¹⁰⁶ Terrell Winder, "'Shouting it Out': Religion and the Development of Black Gay Identities," *Qualitative Sociology* 38, no. 4 (Dec, 2015): 382, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-015-9316-1>.

are, at the very least, heterosexist, but more likely to be stridently anti-homosexuality.¹⁰⁷ One of the interviewees, Wayne (36 years old), who is the coordinator of his church's security team stated with respect to how he is perceived at church in correlation to his sexual orientation, "I mean, honestly, I don't mix sexuality with my religion. When I go to church, I'm not there as a homosexual. I mean, that's not why I'm there. I'm there to praise the Lord and to hear a word. I'm not really thinking of the sexuality part even though it may come up in the sermon or something."¹⁰⁸ In the case of Wayne, he has managed to navigate through the process of compartmentalization of his conflicting identities by denial of his sexual identity in religious settings.

In *The Role of the Black Church in the Lives of Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men*, research was conducted by Dr. Katherine Quinn, Dr. Julia Dickson-Gomez and Dr. Jeffrey A. Kelly. The purpose of the study was "to inform HIV prevention interventions, participation was limited to Black males, as they are disparagingly affected by HIV. Inclusion criteria for youth included self-identifying as Black or African-American, being biologically male, between 16 and 25, identifying as gay or bisexual or having willingly engaged in sex with another male in the previous 12 months, and having a current Church affiliation or having belong to a church within the previous 5 years and left."¹⁰⁹ A 20-year-old youth interviewee responded, "[Religion has] always been pretty important to me, it's just that I've noticed that I feel a straying away from it a lot lately. It's still important, it's just... Well, you know, because I'm gay. And you know Christianity speaks it's a sin, and I don't know. I have just really been thinking of how I can be a

¹⁰⁷ Richard N. Pitt, "'Still Looking for My Jonathan': Gay Black Men's Management of Religious and Sexual Identity Conflicts," *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, no. 1 (December 31, 2009): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918360903285566>.

¹⁰⁸ Pitt, "'Still Looking for My Jonathan,'" 47.

¹⁰⁹ Quinn, Dickson-Gomez, and Kelly, "The Role of the Black Church," 526.

part of religion where it's wrong to be the way that I am, you know?"¹¹⁰ Religion is utterly important in the lives of youth with same-sex attractions. The researchers of this study found that although religion was important, youth still nonetheless wrestled with the tensions of spiritual identity and sexual identity. They remained involved with the church on some level or another, however, that involvement was not consistent. Many men with same-sex attractions wrestle with the prominence of theologically-driven homophobic messages in Black churches; others weather the storm and stay intricately involved in church, and yet others choose to leave the Church all together.

There is also the group of men that remain involved in the church but because of their tension between spiritual and sexual identities, and Internalized Homophobia they choose not to be involved in a committed same-sex relationship. Researchers found this choice is made primarily due to "Fears of rejection and negative evaluation lead individuals with concealable stigmas to avoid entering close relationships for fear of others discovering their stigmatized status."¹¹¹ Stigmas, discrimination, and negative attitudes towards men with same-sex attractions foster psycho-social pressures and conditions that may lead to psychological distress in some men.¹¹² This distress can possibly be a contributing factor to sexual risk behaviors which put men with same-sex attractions at risk for HIV.

Implications of Internalized Homophobia

Researchers have found that men with same-sex attractions have higher rates of psychological distress than heterosexuals.¹¹³ Dr. Ilan H. Meyer attributes these disparities to

¹¹⁰ Quinn, Dickson-Gomez, and Kelly, "The Role of the Black Church," 528.

¹¹¹ Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, Jo C. Phelan, and Bruce G. Link, "Stigma as a Fundamental Cause of Population Health Inequalities," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 5 (March 14, 2013): 815, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.301069>.

¹¹² Ward, "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church," 498.

¹¹³ Puckett et al., "Internalized Heterosexism and Psychological Distress," 426.

minority stressors as one of the possible culprits.¹¹⁴ Negative attitudes towards men with same-sex attractions, the stigmatization associated with homosexuality either from their own internalized homophobia or otherwise, have all been correlated to mental health problems, substance use disorders, depression, suicide, and HIV risk behaviors.

Men with same-sex attractions that are impacted by Internalized Homophobia have increased negative perceptions of themselves which directly influences their mental health. To this Dr. Jae A. Puckett et. al argue, “Although IH characterizes how a person relates to themselves specifically in regard to sexual orientation, it is likely related to broader concepts that are not sexual orientation—specific—such as self-esteem and self-criticism which are both general psychological processes. Self-esteem refers to a person’s ‘favorable or unfavorable attitude toward oneself’ and characterizes a global self-image (Rosenberg, 1962, p. 135)...Self-criticism refers to the ‘harsh punitive evaluation of the self, often accompanied by guilt, feelings of unworthiness and self-recrimination’ (Powers, Zuroff, & Topciu, 2004, p. 61). Both low self-esteem and high self-criticism have been related to an overall self-view that manifests in individuals with depressive symptoms (Adams, Abela, & Hankin, 2007) but they are differentiated in that self-esteem is a global negative or positive sense someone has about who they are and self-criticism is the process of how someone harshly judges themselves.”¹¹⁵ The aforementioned studies substantiate the correlation between low self-esteem, and self-criticism manifesting in psychological distress (e.g. unpleasant feelings and emotions). Furthermore, in light of the stigmatization men with same-sex attractions confront, their levels of self-criticism are greater and present the possibility of indirect paths which would partially give an explanation of the association between Internalized Homophobia and mental health outcomes.

¹¹⁴ Meyer, “Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health,” 4.

¹¹⁵ Puckett et al., “Internalized Heterosexism and Psychological Distress,” 427.

Research has demonstrated that substance abuse is more likely to occur as a coping mechanism for psychological distress in Black men. To this, Dr. Henrie M. Treadwell and her colleagues state, “Since more than one in four Black men experience some form of a mental health or substance abuse disorder (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2001) and 7 percent of all Black men will develop clinical levels of depression during their lifetime, being a Black man has considerable implications for mental health.”¹¹⁶ The statistics concerning depression are astounding with respect to Black men who have sex with men. In their research, *The Relationship of Religiosity, Spirituality, Substance Abuse, and Depression Among Black Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)*, Dr. Tommie Watkins et al. found that rates of depression in Black MSM were 33percent greater than the depression rates of Black heterosexual men. In Black MSM when rates of depression are higher, there is a direct correlation to higher levels of sexual risk.

Previous research has shown that Blacks typically have a strong religious affiliation.¹¹⁷ In many cases while attending Black churches, Black congregants receive theologically-driven homophobic messages. This in part explains why Blacks are more likely to report same-sex attractions as “always wrong” and typically refrain from HIV testing due to IH, and the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS being a “gay disease.”

Studies with a focus of high-risk sexual behaviors have found that IH cultivates an atmosphere of silence in MSM with respect to their sexual behaviors and negatively affects the

¹¹⁶ Henrie M. Treadwell, Clare Xanthos, and Kisha B. Holden, *Social Determinants of Health Among African-American Men*, Second Edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 41.

¹¹⁷ *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008), 40, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/05/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.

likelihood of Black MSM having discussion about high-risk behaviors.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Dr. Watkins and his colleagues suggest, “This culture of silence can lessen the impact of HIV prevention education interventions (Jeffries et al. 2012; Martin and Knox 1997; Malebranche 2003). Some studies also have suggested that the internalization of religiously influenced homonegative messages contributes to lower self-efficacy regarding preventive sexual practices among this population (Martin and Knox 1997; Noar et al. 2009; Stokes and Peterson 1998).”¹¹⁹ Once again, due to negative views projected by many Black churches with respect to same-sex attractions, Black MSM find themselves in the quandary of that of their spiritual identity juxtaposed to that of their sexual identity. This dichotomy of identities has the possibility of causing a conflict in one’s perception of themselves which can lead to activities associated with HIV-related risks. Moreover, Black MSM that have religious affiliations, more pointedly with Black churches are less likely to enter committed same-sex relationships, practice safe sex, and engage in condom use. These activities put Black MSM at greater risk to succumbing to being infected with a sexually transmitted disease, including HIV.

Conclusion

Internalized Homophobia in the lives of Black MSM shows up in three domains: social domain, mental domain, and psychological domain. Religious affiliation can have both positive and negative mental health outcomes. Given the unique set of sociocultural stressors Black MSM face, research suggests that they are more susceptible to and “are disproportionately burdened by mental health problems and disorders, the most severe of which are depression, anxiety, and

¹¹⁸ Tommie L. Watkins, Cathy Simpson, Stacey S. Cofield, Susan Davies, Connie Kohler, and Stuart Usdan, “The Relationship Between HIV Risk, High-Risk Behavior, Religiosity, and Spirituality Among Black Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM): An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 2 (April 2016): 536, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0142-2>.

¹¹⁹ Watkins et al., “The Relationship Between HIV Risk,” 537.

suicidality (i.e., suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and completed suicides).”¹²⁰ One of the most pervasive theoretical models that has been identified as a pathway to these negative mental health outcomes is the internalization of negative attitudes. In this case, this would be the Internalized Homophobia that Black MSM with religious affiliations in Black churches face through the prevalence of theologically-driven homophobic sermonic messages and negative attitudes that they are subjected to in Black congregations.

Given the numerous negative impacts on Black MSM that Internalized Homophobia derived from theologically-driven homophobic messages and negative attitudes in Black churches, it is the intention of this work to challenge these congregations to confront its current views on the same.

¹²⁰ Treadwell et al., *Social Determinants of Health Among African-American Men*, 64.

CHAPTER 4

Confronting Homophobia and the HIV/AIDS Stigma

This chapter is a five part exploration of homophobia and Black churches beginning with discussion on the church's beliefs about homosexuality, and Black churches theological attitudes that breed homophobia. Second, is an in-depth review of Black churches' theological shifts on controversial social issues over time in comparison to homosexuality. The third part delves into the attitudes and beliefs about HIV/AIDS in the Black community and its connection to the spiritual and cultural views about homosexuality that have been fueled in Black churches. Part four focuses on highlighting general principles of Christian grace, how that grace is or is not exemplified within Black churches when it pertains to homosexuality. The fifth and final part is a discussion on how Black churches can move towards positive responses to the members of its congregations with same-sex attractions by being loving and welcoming. The framework for examining confronting homophobia and the HIV/AIDS Stigma will be Dr. Richard Osmer's four task, the pragmatic task, "How might we respond?"¹²¹ It will be used with the intention of inspiring genuine discourse and ministering to those impacted by the polarizing topic of homosexuality in Black churches.

Beliefs on Homosexuality in Black Churches

Among the seven historically Black churches there is a collective theological view that says sinners should be embraced and not judged; this theological view is applied and adhered to by most people within Black churches. That is however, until it comes to men with same-sex attractions. For the most part, men with same-sex attractions are *not* embraced, and *are* judged. If these church theories were a reality, Black churches collectively would be reaching out to men

¹²¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

with same-sex attractions to embrace and minister to them. However, as noted in Chapter One by Dr. E. Patrick Johnson, “The pathologizing of homosexuality as “unnatural” and “ungodly” creates a hostile, oppressive, and homophobic environment for gays and lesbians--an environment that is, according to Christian doctrine, supposed to foster community and acceptance through Christ.”¹²² To move forward, the Church must have authentic dialogue with itself and seek transparent responses from within its own current beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as from those of its tradition.

Homophobia is present all throughout society, and its negative impacts can be felt in various ways. The one area in which one would least expect its reach to impact is the church. Over the years, Black churches have shifted their ideologies on certain social issues; however, they have remained stagnant with respect to most of their positions regarding same-sex attractions. Through its theologically-driven homophobic rhetoric, Black churches have historically been a primary source of the homophobia that is present in the Black community. Homophobia in the Black church community is evident in church bylaws¹²³, Sunday sermons, Bible study classes, lyrics in Gospel songs¹²⁴, and public statements from Gospel musicians.¹²⁵ Ministry leaders and congregants alike must come to grips with the errors of their ways concerning the suffering that their theologically-driven homophobic views have caused its members with same-sex attractions to experience in their lives. By influencing conceptions of what it is to be a Black man, theologically-driven homophobia fosters a sense of hyper masculinity within Black communities. Dr Elijah Ward states, “Heterosexual men who might not normally express a hypermasculinity may feel pressure to do so as a result of repeated,

¹²² Johnson, “Feeling the Spirit in the Dark,” 96.

¹²³ The Office of the Presiding Bishop, “Statement on the Faith...,” 7.

¹²⁴ Patterson, “Winans Sisters Stand Behind Anti-Gay Song,”
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/565690905?accountid=35804>.

¹²⁵ Cane, “What Kim Burrell's Rant Reveals.”

impassioned church-inspired homophobic messages.”¹²⁶ These acts of homophobia, take an adverse psychological and social toll on the lives of those within the community. The fallout not only shapes the lives of men with same-sex attractions, but adversely impacts those of Black heterosexual males and females.¹²⁷ Within the seven historically Black denominations, all would say that “God is Love” and that they “Love all people,” however, their actions towards homosexuals seriously challenges the demonstration of God’s love when the majority of Black men with same-sex attractions believe they are not welcome.¹²⁸ One of the major challenges for Black churches who stand firm on their oppressive scriptural position regarding homosexuality is the fact many have shifted their position on a plethora of other controversial social issues. Nonetheless, they sadly remain unmoved in their position on homosexuality.

The Black Church and Social Issues

Ecclesia across many denominations have wrestled with and have had substantial debates concerning the hermeneutics of religious texts. For centuries, theologians have re-interpreted many of the passages and juxtaposed their relevance based on societal and cultural beliefs. Given the passage of time, certain controversial biblical issues such as polygamy, women’s role in ministry, homosexuality, slavery, medicinal treatments, and dietary restrictions have all had different modern interpretations and applications based on the principles of the contextual method of biblical interpretation, the hermeneutic circle and biblical exegesis. As scriptural context and modern application remain an issue for many Christians, the attitudes and beliefs about the aforementioned controversial biblical issues and others within the Canon of Scripture have shifted over time. This reality presents a multifaceted challenge for men and women of the

¹²⁶ Ward, "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church," 498.

¹²⁷ Ward, "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church," 498.

¹²⁸ Sneed, *Representations of Homosexuality*, 89.

cloth. The initial challenge is the attempt to understand traditional Biblical paradigms, and the second one becomes their relevancy to current societal issues, not only with respect to governing their own lives, but those of their parishioners as well.

Theological Shifts on Controversial Social Issues

The culture of bias is no stranger to Black churches.¹²⁹ It manifests itself in many matters concerning the Church from racial bias of slavery, mental health, gender and sexuality issues. In particular, both gender and sexuality have been concerns within Black churches since its inception.¹³⁰ A prime exemplar of such a shift is that of how the Black church views women in ministry. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 reads, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”¹³¹ The Church has vacillated on its interpretation of this scripture, and today women serve in official leadership roles and teaching capacities. With regard to gender bias, womanist theologian Dr. Stephanie Y. Mitchem comments on the Black faith community, “Since that time [referencing the end of legal segregation in America], through the Civil Rights, Black Power, feminist, and various white ethnic movements, socio-economic shifts have been rapid...The discipline of theology also shifted: new voices with new realities pointed to new understandings of the Divine...Womanist theory was born in these historic and theological shifts.”¹³² Black congregations are made up of some 70 to 80 percent women and they can be found serving in various roles within the fabric of the Church.¹³³ There is a long history of the value that women

¹²⁹ Robert London Smith Jr., *From Strength to Strength: Shaping a Black Practical Theology for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007), 22.

¹³⁰ Smith, *From Strength to Strength*, 22.

¹³¹ 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (NIV).

¹³² Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4; Smith, *From Strength to Strength*, 22.

¹³³ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 128; Smith, *From Strength to Strength*, 22.

have added to not only the Black community, but its churches. Women's involvement and prominent voices have only recently translated into Black females having appointments into more leadership roles, including preachers and pastors, than the church has had in its history. This is largely due to women's movements that have taken place over the last decade.¹³⁴ Although the number of women that have been ordained as pastors and other leadership roles within many denominations has increased, there remains room for growth. This growth is pertinent to the Church's foundation, in that gender bias negates a key principle of the gospel message asserting the worth of all humankind.

Although Black churches have begun addressing the present issues of gender bias, the issues surrounding sexuality remain controversial in Black churches. For Black churches, one of the greatest challenges that remains unaddressed is homophobia in general and God's view of homosexuality in particular. Dr. Anthony B. Pinn argues, "In its most counterproductive stance, the Black Church joins other religious organizations in condemning homosexuality. Even when many Black Christians in the Black Church seek to be liberal and understanding, their perspective still smells of homophobia. For example, it is common to hear members of the Black Church say with confidence: 'We must hate the sin [homosexuality] but love the sinner.'¹³⁵ Although cloaked in spiritual jargon, at the core the problem is still the same. On the one hand, Black churches act with hostility towards men with same-sex attractions, and on the other hand, function in a state of hypocrisy by allowing these men to serve in key positions within the Church as long as they keep their sexual orientation private. In *The Black Church in the Post-*

¹³⁴ Ruth Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1987), Preface.

¹³⁵ Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 108.

Civil Rights Era, Dr. Anthony B. Pinn captures the following statement of a gay man which is involved in the Black church:

I really see a persistent problem in the church... I'm now 60 and I've been working in the church since I was 10 years old. And the issue of sex, this business of homosexuality, has been wrapped in hypocrisy for too many years. Because even when I was a kid of 10, 12 when I first started playing piano, I used to hear ministers say they were going to find them a real sissy to play music in their church....So while on one side of the pulpit the picture was condemning sex between people of the same-sex, on the other side in order to enhance and build their congregation and get the people shouting they were willing to forget the so-called theological issues in order to enhance their pocketbook oh, so you know. The hypocrisy must be addressed.¹³⁶

On any given Sunday in Black churches across America, the music ministry of men with same-sex attractions can be heard whether from the choir, praise team, musicians or even the selection that is being sung, or play which was written and/or recorded by a man with same-sex attractions. There is the unspoken knowledge of the sexual preference of these men, and as long as they are not forthcoming with their orientation, and keep the pews full, they are tolerated for the benefit of the Church.

In his book, *The Cornel West Reader*, Dr. Cornel West gives an exemplar of his experience with a gay musician in the Black church when he was a youngster:

I know when I was growing up in the Black community, most people knew that, let's say, the brother who played the organ in the church was a gay brother. People would say, oh, that's so-and-so's child. You know, he's that way. And you just keep moving. There wasn't an attempt to focus on his sexuality; he was an integral part of the community. It wasn't a matter of trying to target him and somehow pester him or openly, publicly degrade him. Those who said he's "that way" didn't believe that way was desirable, but they just figured that's just the way he was, that's just his thing, you know.¹³⁷

When asked if there were personal challenges for him taking a visible stance on heterosexism and homophobia, he replied:

¹³⁶ Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, 110.

¹³⁷ Vitka Eisen and Mary Kenyetta, "Christian Love and Heterosexism," in *The Cornel West Reader*, ed. Cornel West (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 404.

...A person might think, wait a minute, why is he so concerned about homophobia? There must be something going on in his personal life, and so forth. My view is that I have to recognize deep homophobia inside of me, because I grew up in the Black community, in the black church, on the black block, and there's a lot of homophobia in all three sites. So I am quite candid about the internal struggle that I undergo because of my own homophobic socialization. How do you deal with the feelings of either threat or fear -and, I think, for many homophobes - outright hatred? I don't think I ever, even as a young person, hated gay brothers or lesbian sisters... That's where my moral struggle comes into play, in terms of acknowledging that difference from my perspective, but not associating it with degradation or disgust. Rather, it is just a particular mode of human expression that I have been taught to associate with degradation. I simply acknowledge it as different, but I do not have to make that connection with degradation per se.¹³⁸

Dr. West's paradigm echoes across large segments of the Black community and the issue of sexual orientation has come to the forefront and become more prevalent within the last few decades. No matter one's view of same-sex attractions, the person that identifies with same-sex attractions must not be viewed with degradation or disgust. Men with same-sex attractions in Black churches particularly, have begun raising questions and concerns as to where they fit in the fabric of contemporary Black churches. While Black churches have augmented their interpretations and application of scripture with evolving social constructs such as gender equality, homosexuality is a social issue that has not been addressed and is presenting new challenges for Black churches today.

Black Church's relevance to 21st century Social Issues

Black churches have forged themselves a reputation as the nucleus of the community. If Black churches are to remain relevant and continue serving the community at large, they must engage in providing robust services to its members that have not been served, possibly neglected, rejected, marginalized, and negatively impacted. More pointedly, Black churches must embrace the onus of its theological task of meeting the needs of all people, including those congregants

¹³⁸ Eisen and Kenyetta, "Christian Love and Heterosexism," 403.

with same-sex attractions. Black men with same-sex attractions are living in a society that will oppress them based on their race and sexual orientation, with slurs, violence and alienation. Unfortunately, Black churches have not fostered a safe place for them to process these life realities under healthy spiritual care. By making the gospel relevant and fleshing out its core tenants for a time such as this, Black churches must call into question the present homophobic views and stigmas associated with HIV/AIDS that are steeped in hermeneutical issues, and traditional bias.¹³⁹

Given the long history Blacks have with being oppressed, and the centuries associated with striving towards liberation from oppression, it would serve purpose that Black churches as a whole would be the last place one would be subjected to oppression. Unfortunately, with respect to homophobia that is not the case. Although the presence of homophobia in Black churches is substantiated and justified by theologically-driven views, they are nonetheless theologically-driven homophobic views.

Christian Grace, Beliefs in the Black Church, and Homophobia

Christian Grace

Dr. Osmer's third task of practical theology - the normative task, asks "What ought to be going on?" To engage in the analysis pertaining to the homophobic views, attitudes and atmosphere in Black churches it is best to utilize a common constitution - which is the Bible, and each of the seven historic denominations would suggest that it guides their actions and beliefs. To this end, answering Dr. Osmer's question of "What ought to be going on?" this section juxtaposes Christian ideologies on grace against the beliefs and practices in Black churches when it comes to homophobia and same-sex attractions. The theological reflection of Black churches

¹³⁹ Graham, *Discovering Images of God*, 81.

then becomes, “how can we as a Church embody the love of Christ, and model the Grace of God that is extended to us, by extending it to others?” And more pointedly, “What is the correlation between same-sex attractions and grace? In the context of the theological constraints presented herein, there is one thing that all discussions and responses to the vast range of sexual issues that the Church faces should be in the spirit of grace. For the purpose of this project I use the definition present by Robert V. Rakestraw in “Gay Sex and Grace: What Does Grace Have to Do with Homosexual Practices?,” “As commonly used in our language today, “grace” refers to a nexus of attitudes (ideally followed by words and actions) such as kindness, generosity, favor, non-judgmentalism, patience, acceptance, goodwill, mercy, benevolence, and (especially in certain Christian circles) rejection of legalism. Each of these attitudes, when accompanied by appropriate language and deeds, is part of the total pattern of grace that characterizes truly gracious human beings.”¹⁴⁰ Dr. Rakestraw's outlook on grace is a powerful paradigm for Christians. Whether or not one believes living a gay life is in opposition to God's will it is this grace which God extends to us, that we in turn should extend to others, particularly those that identify as having same-sex attractions. Christians have an obligation above everyone else to ensure that any discourse that is had concerning one's sexual orientation or issues surrounding the same must be filtered through the lens of and dealt with in the spirit of grace.

In his book, *Confronting Homophobia in the Black Church*, Dr. Bill Burwell, Jr. states, “I was reminded rather forcefully by Tim Wilkins, a self-described former homosexual, ‘that the Great Commission is to go and make disciples, not heterosexuals...It is absurd for churches and/or therapist to try and make the homosexual heterosexual.’” The goal of all churches is not to make men with same-sex attractions heterosexuals, but rather to make all people better

¹⁴⁰ Robert V. Rakestraw, “Gay Sex and Grace: What Does Grace Have to Do with Homosexual Practices?” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 59, no. 1 (2016): 24.

followers of Christ. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, is arguably one of the most recognizable scriptures of Christianity. It reads, “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”¹⁴¹ With discipleship as the focus, the Church then fosters the atmosphere for those being discipled to have an encounter with Christ. It is then that through a person’s one on one relationship with Christ that he or she will be made into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30).

The Great Commandment captured in Matthew 22:35-40 reads, “One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” The task of the Church then is to ensure that we are embodying the “Jesus’ love ethic to whatever sexual mores [that] are prevalent in a given culture.”¹⁴² Dr. Walter Wink suggests, “We can challenge both gays and straights to question their behaviors in the light of love and the requirements of fidelity, honesty, responsibility, and genuine concern for the best interests of the other and of society as a whole...Christian morality, after all, is not an iron chastity belt for repressing urges, but a way of expressing the integrity of our relationship with God. It is the attempt to discover a manner of living that is consistent with who God created us to be. For those of same-sex orientation, as for heterosexuals, being moral means rejecting sexual mores that

¹⁴¹ Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV).

¹⁴² Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches* (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 1999), 45.

violate their own integrity and that of others, and attempting to discover what it would mean to live by the love ethic of Jesus.”¹⁴³ The issues surrounding the hermeneutical challenges of scripture as they relate to homosexuality will undoubtedly exist until the end of time.

Nonetheless, what is abundantly clear in scripture is the love that we are to have for another.

Christian grace, the Great Commission, nor the Great Commandment have been practiced by Black churches when it pertains to those men that have same-sex attractions. Black churches have caused psychological damage and social alienation, neither of which are a display of Christian grace or the Love of Christ. These realities are birthed largely in part by the beliefs about homosexuality in Black churches.

HIV/AIDS

Research has shown that on the onset of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, it was met with varying responses from religious communities.¹⁴⁴ Within the many religious communities, there are various organizations, distinct traditions, and various themes within those traditions.¹⁴⁵ To this researchers state:

Many religious groups have interpreted the AIDS epidemic in the light of their beliefs and teachings. Those interpretations have often led to public pronouncements on AIDS education, prevention, and care, as well as to the shaping of public attitudes toward those afflicted by or at risk of HIV infection. In addition, individuals who identify themselves with particular religious denominations or express particular religious viewpoints have taken positions about AIDS in light of their beliefs. Their positions have often been within the realm of private attitudes, but sometimes they have been manifested in public comments and actions. Given the broad influence of religion in the United States, the response of religious organizations and individuals is a factor in the effort to control the epidemic and to care for those affected by it.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Wink, *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 45.

¹⁴⁴ Albert R. Jonsen and Jeff Stryker, eds., "National Research Council (US) Panel on Monitoring the Social Impact of the AIDS Epidemic," *The Social Impact of AIDS in The United States* (National Academies Press, 1993), 119, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK234566/>.

¹⁴⁵ Jonsen and Stryker, "National Research Council," 119.

¹⁴⁶ Jonsen and Stryker, "National Research Council," 117.

As it relates to Black churches, once again the response was one of silence. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas posits that the views of the Black church and community regarding Black sexuality have adversely impacted effective responses to the AIDS crisis. She further suggests that the Black church's views have cultivated a culture of intolerance of sexual diversity.¹⁴⁷ In *Conflicts Within the Black Churches*, Dr. Angelique Harris suggests, "Prior to the AIDS epidemic, Black churches and communities avoided open and frank discussions of sex, sexuality, and homosexuality. However, AIDS made it clear that acknowledging homosexuality was a matter of life and death for Blacks... In the United States, Black women and men make up almost half of all those with HIV/AIDS (CDC 2013). Additionally, Blacks are also significantly more likely to die from the opportunistic infections and ailments that arise as a result of AIDS (CDC 2013)."¹⁴⁸ This was, and is largely due to the issue of HIV/AIDS having attached to it multi-level stigmas. Globally there are several complexities and modes of transmission with HIV. Outside of the United States the disease is found among heterosexuals primarily; however, with respect to the United States there is a heavy concentration among men who have sex with men, some are homosexual, while others are bisexual and identify as heterosexual.¹⁴⁹ As a disease, HIV/AIDS is unique not only in the modes of transmission, but also because of its association in the United States with a group that is stigmatized (men who have sex with men) and in that context the transmission of the disease takes place in what is viewed as stigmatized or deviant sexual behaviors.

Further complicating the matter, researchers state, "Most research on AIDS in Black American communities maintains that homophobia within Black communities, and especially

¹⁴⁷ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 2-4.

¹⁴⁸ Angelique Harris, "Conflicts Within the Black Churches," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 401-402.

¹⁴⁹ Harris, "Conflicts Within the Black Churches," 401-402.

within the Black Church, has had great implications for the perceived susceptibility of HIV infection among Blacks, particularly during the early years of the epidemic (Dalton 1989; Fullilove and Fullilove 1997; Cohen 1999; A. Harris 2010).”¹⁵⁰ At best, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was met with a dismal response from Black churches. In her book, *AIDS, Sexuality, and the Black Church: Making the Wounded Whole*, Dr. Angelique C. Harris, sheds light on the AIDS activism which is taking place within Black churches in New York City. Dr. Harris gives the revealing and transparent account that AIDS has taken a mortifying toll on the Black church and the Black community. At the time of publication, Dr. Harris stated, “Blacks made up approximately 13% of the total United States population, but almost half of all those infected with HIV in the U.S. are Black.”¹⁵¹ Research that was previously done has attributed this high rate to the lack of an immediate response by Black church leaders during the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980’s and even its lack of response to date.¹⁵² The presence of homophobia within Black churches has exasperated the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS due to its belief that such conversations are inappropriate in the church.

The Church's response, or lack thereof was due to many challenges: (1) HIV/AIDS association with men who have sex with men, (2) its transmission through what the church viewed as stigmatized or deviant sexual behaviors, and/or intravenous drug use, and lastly but perhaps most important, (3) A. with respect to the prevention of the diseases’ transmission through sexual activities, would require the Church to engage in safe sex education with regards to the use of condoms. This was of course viewed by the Church as sending a contradictory message to its parishioners. B. with respect to the prevention of the diseases’ transmission

¹⁵⁰ Harris, “Conflicts Within the Black Churches,” 402.

¹⁵¹ Harris, *AIDS, Sexuality, and the Black Church*, Back Cover.

¹⁵² Harris, *AIDS, Sexuality, and the Black Church*, Back Cover.

through intravenous drug use, would require the Church to educate injection drug users on the importance of using clean needles. This was also perceived by the Church to be sending contradictory message to its parishioners.¹⁵³

Since the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, those persons that were impacted by the disease have been plagued with stigmatization and discrimination. In her book, *Stand Up to Stigma*, Perness C. Seele argues:

The spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering of women and gay and bisexual men, especially those in their formative years (thirteen to twenty-nine), cannot be ignored. Behaviors of sexual violence, sexual promiscuity, homophobia, and HIV stigma are sustained through silence within the population at large. This indifference quietly supports violence and bullying against women and gay men of all ages, and the relief they often seek is through suicide and other self-destructive behaviors. Certainly, stigma has supported the spread of HIV over the past decades. Fear of being stigmatized forces people into isolation or prevents them from disclosing their HIV status to friends, loved ones, and sexual partners. As we have witnessed throughout the AIDS epidemic thus far, stigma can also prevent persons from getting employment, housing, insurance, or other benefits, as well as result in them being ostracized by family, friends, and other social circles.¹⁵⁴

The reluctance of Black churches to discuss the presence, and aggressively address the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS within the Black community has cost the lives of many within the community at large. James 5:14-15 reads, “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”¹⁵⁵ The call went out for the elders by those that were directly and indirectly impacted by HIV/AIDS, and it was met with a deafening silence.

To this point we have used Dr. Osmer’s framework to highlight issues surrounding homophobia in Black churches. We explored what is going on, why is it going on, and what

¹⁵³ Harris, “Conflicts Within the Black Churches,” 402.

¹⁵⁴ Perness C. Seele, *Stand up to Stigma: How We Reject Fear and Shame* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2017), 72.

¹⁵⁵ James 5:14-15 (NIV).

ought to be going on. With the alienation and spiritual neglect of men with same-sex attractions in Black churches, and the stigmatism associated with HIV/AIDS, there is much room for growth. Dr. Osmer's fourth and final task for practical theology is the pragmatic task, which asks "How might we respond?" which is the most imperative part of this conversation.¹⁵⁶

How Might Black Churches Respond

Researchers, Theologians, Scholars, and Men and Women of the Cloth alike have all heightened the awareness of Black churches and the Black community at large of the need for continued discourse concerning the issue of sexuality. During one of the National Black Religious Summits Rev. Carlton W. Veazey, the then president and CEO of the Religious Coalition stated, "We no longer feel intimidated by the forces that would have us remain silent about sexuality. The Black church has come to understand that we must minister to the whole person, not just a person's spiritual life but every part of his or her being, recognizing the interrelation of our sexual nature and our spiritual nature."¹⁵⁷ Open discourse such as this at conferences, seminars, and summits will equip those men and women in leadership roles in Black churches as to how they might deal with issues surrounding sexuality within their congregations.

For churches who embrace the Biblical approach, and are desirous of dealing with the negative stigmas associated with the historical bias to HIV/AIDS they can begin to curate healthy responses via educational programs in churches, the community, and in academic institutions. By offering educational programs that have curriculums on sex and sexuality for teenagers and adults, churches can provide the necessary tools and information for members to make informed discussions. The first option would of course be that of abstinence, however, the

¹⁵⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Leslie Watson, "Breaking the Silence on Sexuality by Leslie M. Watson - Human and Civil Rights," In Motion Magazine, September 19, 1998, <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/watson2.html>.

program would provide a platform and entree for safe sex discussions to be had with those that made other choices.

On the academia level, institutions with a focus on theology can offer programs with a focus of Spirituality and Sexuality. As part of the program, the institution can provide access to internships for students to apply that which they learned. This would also provide a platform that would foster dialogue between churches and current seminarians which are being confronted with the current issues of society daily.

Strides have been made by some Black churches in recent years to become educated about pressing issues surrounding homophobia, and the stigmas of HIV/AIDS. Nonetheless, Black churches as a whole must aggressively begin taking part in a collective solution to the challenges facing its congregants due to homophobia and the stigmas associated with HIV/AIDS. The Church must make strides in coming against stigmas of all kinds, and no longer take part in exacerbating the mental and health challenges members of their churches are faced with by perpetuating the stigma and discrimination which takes place on the lives of men with same-sex attractions.

Conclusion

Black churches are not unique in the fact that they face many challenging situations within their congregations. What has been unique is the response, or lack thereof by the Church to these issues. In part this is due to a long-standing history of issues that have plagued the Black community with respect to sex and sexuality, and in part, it is due to the theological beliefs of the Church. By using as a framework the final task presented in Dr. Richard R. Osmer's *Practical*

Theology: An Introduction, this chapter admonishes Black churches to call into question their views on same-sex attractions juxtaposed to the grace that God extends to us.¹⁵⁸

In doing so Black churches are implored to implement the disciplines of practical theology and theological reflection to confront the issue of homophobia in the Black church and the HIV/AIDS stigma oftentimes attached to Black men who engage in same-sex relationships.

As one of the most enduring and impactful institutions of the Black community, Black churches and religion at large for Black persons has had an indisputable historical importance. Black church's beliefs on homosexuality which are embedded in church bylaws, has fostered a complex dynamic about sexual orientation in and outside the church, and has fueled religious oppression of Black men who identify with same-sex attractions. It is very apparent how the beliefs inside the church have a strong influence on homophobia within the Black community. Black churches have functioned as the voice of the Black community with respect to civil and human rights for Blacks. The hope is that this will be the continuance of fruitful dialogue towards mutual understanding between those who identify as having same-sex attractions, and those that would stand in judgment in Black churches. After years of combing the scriptures, self-reflection, and asking the tough questions of those in leadership over them, countless men with same-sex attractions are coming to the conclusion 'that a change has gotta come.' 'A change has gotta come' with respect to the pain, suffering, sadness, and abuse that they have suffered in their lives by the hand of Black churches.

Although homophobia and HIV/AIDS are complicated matters, at its core, the response of Black churches to these matters must be one of action. This action begins with Black churches exemplifying the key tenets of the Great Commission, which is calling them to make disciples by

¹⁵⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

providing spiritual care to all in the manner that Christ would, and by ministering His grace and mercy to all.

CHAPTER 5

Spiritual Care of Men with Same-Sex Attractions

We try to let them see that the church is an open door that enshrines, encloses, cherishes that there must be these two aspects of religion. First, the church is an open door, and second, the church is a hospital for broken spirits, broken dreams, broken minorities. The church is a hospital for brokenness. Therefore, if a person who is different than you comes to you, you don't break them. You heal them if they are broken, and you let them heal you if you were broken. You have a decision to make; if you're going to be a hospital, you're going to accommodate brokenness; if you're going to stand at an open door, you going to let everyone in. Now, you can't have it both ways: and open door that is shut, a hospital that only heals a category. So you have to decide, but the church doesn't have a decision. The decision was made for the church when the church advertised itself as a care package, not a care-less package.

-Rev. Dr. Cecil "Chip" Murray, *A Whosoever Will Church*

The previous chapter noted that if Black churches are to remain relevant regarding social issues and aim to continue serving the community at large, they must provide robust services to its members that have historically not been embraced within the Black church community. According to a report done by The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, on LGBT African Americans and African American Same-sex Couples, 3.7 percent of African American Adults identify as LGBT.¹⁵⁹ This translates into 1,018,700 estimated LGBT African American Adults in the United States who potentially are not receiving holistic pastoral/spiritual care from Black churches.¹⁶⁰ The theological paradigm and practical application of meeting the spiritual needs of

¹⁵⁹ The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, *LGBT African-American Individuals and African-American Same-Sex Couples*, October 16, 2013, 1, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/lgbt-african-american-oct-2013/>.

¹⁶⁰ "LGBT African-American Individuals," 1.

all people should remain a fundamental tenet of the Church, including those congregants with same-sex attractions.

This chapter examines pastoral and spiritual care within Black churches pertaining to men with same-sex attractions. For this topic, the terms spiritual care and pastoral care will be used interchangeably.¹⁶¹ Operative in this project is the historical perspective and definition of pastoral care provided by William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle in *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*: “The ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, consist of helping acts, done by *representative Christian persons*, directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the *context of ultimate meanings and concerns*.”¹⁶² Pastoral care is performed by what Clebsch and Jaekle reference as “representative Christian persons.” These “representatives” may or may not be men or women within the Church that hold an office. But they are certainly persons that are members of the body of Christ that bring with them authority, insight and wisdom with respect to the Christian faith, Christian tradition, and Christian life.¹⁶³ Pastoral care is no longer done only by representative Christian persons. A more modern reference of pastoral care can be found in Emmanuel Y. Lartey’s *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, in which he suggests that “pastoral is not simply taken to mean ‘pertaining to the ordained Christian.’”¹⁶⁴ While the field certainly began as a Christocentric field, it now embraces more religious perspectives.

¹⁶¹ There have been distinctions made between pastoral and spiritual care. Spiritual care has been used within hospitals as well as other contexts to denote an interfaith approach to care.

¹⁶² William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1983), 4.

¹⁶³ Clebsch and Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, second edition (New York, NY: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 13.

The scholarship of pastoral care brings with it seven functions that have typically been used in Christian ministry. As presented previously by Clebsch and Jaekle, pastoral care has focused its attention on the processes of *healing*, *sustaining*, *guiding* and *reconciling*. Howard Clinebell added *nurturing* to the process, and Emmanuel Y. Lartey added *liberating* and *empowering*.¹⁶⁵

It is in the *healing* process that restoration, healing of wounds, repairing and recovery of that which has been lost takes place.¹⁶⁶ *Sustaining* is assistance provided to persons in an effort for them to persevere and transcend difficult and trying situations. The intent is to either prevent or circumvent the impact of said situation. A person is also provided with the assistance of *sustaining* when healing is not an option.¹⁶⁷ *Guiding* is the process of aiding a person who is in the midst of a challenging situation by offering alternative choices in an effort to resolve the challenging situation(s) they face. Restoration of broken relationship is the process of *reconciliation*. This restoration takes place between God, the person, and others.¹⁶⁸ *Nurturing* takes place when the pastoral practitioner functions as a facilitator of growth by providing a combination of caring and confrontation. The process of nurturing is ongoing and can be found in and throughout life-stages involving opportunity and even crisis.¹⁶⁹ Heightening awareness with respect to the origins and causes of oppression and control over others in society is the complex and difficult process of *liberating*.¹⁷⁰ The consideration of options to bring about change are an important element of this process. Pastoral practitioners are often relied upon to serve as a catalyst for cultural and social action with hopes of personal and communal

¹⁶⁵ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 66-68.

¹⁶⁶ Edward P. Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 18.

¹⁶⁷ Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, 18.

¹⁶⁹ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 66.

¹⁷⁰ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 67.

liberation.¹⁷¹ In the process of *empowerment*, practitioners draw out and build up the "unnoticed strengths and resources within and around people and communities," which are innately present.¹⁷²

As a framework for providing a plan of action to address the shortcomings of spiritual care for men with same-sex attractions in Black churches, I have critically appropriated models of pastoral care as presented by Lartey in his work, *In Living Color*. The five major models presented by Lartey are pastoral care as therapy, pastoral care as ministry, pastoral care as social action, pastoral care as empowerment, and pastoral care as personal interaction.¹⁷³ The three specific models which easily lend themselves to a spiritual care appropriation in the context of spiritual care for Black men with same-sex attractions are the following: pastoral care as ministry, pastoral care as social action, and pastoral care as empowerment. These models are selected because they speak directly to intersections of Black churches and the issues facing those Black men that identify as having same-sex attractions and will be used as guidelines¹⁷⁴ for personal introspection as ministerial inventory regarding what is being done well versus not so well. Each of these models will be examined through the lens of pastoral and spiritual care as defined by Clebsch and Jaekle: healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling.

Spiritual Care as Ministry

Spiritual care as Ministry should be examined from three viewpoints: pastoral and spiritual leadership,¹⁷⁵ church culture,¹⁷⁶ and community involvement. This section examines pastoral and spiritual leadership through the lens of the Pastor as Shepherd; spiritual care based on church culture and how caring the church is towards men with same-sex attractions; and

¹⁷¹ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 67.

¹⁷² Lartey, *In Living Color*, 58.

community involvement by assessing how Black churches have engaged the community when it comes to same-sex attractions.

The Pastor as Shepherd

Pastoral and spiritual care in the context of Black churches takes place when individuals experience a need which exceeds their personal resources, and as a remedy, solicits the aid of the church community for resources, wisdom, and religious support. Regarding Black gay men in Black churches, the views of the lead pastor as shepherd oftentimes sets the tone for how the church will effectively provide resources and religious support. In this manner, no matter where pastors or laity land with respect to their views of same-sex attractions, whether it is an orientation, sexual preference, nature or nurture, at its core they are charged with the mandate to nurture and support the congregation or as many Black churches refer to as “shepherd the flock.” for the purposes of this project, the phrase “shepherd the flock”¹⁷⁷ is used as a metaphor to symbolize the act of providing leadership, protection, and provision in the broader sense as captured in Isaiah 40:11. In the context of comfort for His people and preparation for His return, the Lord God gives as an example Isaiah 40:11, “...tends his flock like a shepherd.” In the broader sense, pastoral care must not be viewed through a lens of solely being the responsibility of the pastor, but as a catalyst for all ministry tasks. This is accomplished through overarching “premise that encompasses, permeates, informs, and inspires all ministry tasks performed by the pastor” and laity.

¹⁷³ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 55-59.

¹⁷⁴ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 107.

¹⁷⁵ Pastoral and spiritual leadership in this context is meant to mean: the guidance of congregants towards a healthy relationship with God.

¹⁷⁶ Church culture in this context is meant to mean: the atmosphere that is present amongst the membership, during and after worship. This is inclusive of the music, sermons, and biblical teachings.

¹⁷⁷ It is noted that in *Survival and Liberation*, Womanist Pastoral Theologian, Dr. Carroll Watkins Ali, addresses the issue of the pastoral role being equated to that of the “Shepherd.” In this work Dr. Ali challenges Seward Hiltner’s metaphor of “shepherding the flock” as a pastoral theology paradigm.

Utilizing Dr. McMickle's view, pastoral care processes in relation to spiritual care among pastors as shepherds are some practical approaches one might use in relation to Black men with same-sex attractions.

Spiritual care as shepherd informs two essential areas: visiting the sick and preaching and worshipping.¹⁷⁸ In the visitation of the sick, the time becomes one-on-one sacred time that healing and ministry can go forth. The mere presence of the pastor can provide a sense of comfort and support in the midst of some of life's most trying times. As with any member, men with same-sex attractions find interaction with the Pastor of the church as being a key element of their membership of the church. It is the personal interaction with congregants that allows a pastor or ministry leaders to have entree for laying a foundation for spiritual care with members. Lartey captures, "Value is also placed upon verbal expressiveness, articulation of feelings and client self-disclosure within a warm, accepting and nonjudgmental environment largely produced by the carer's skills in personal relationship."¹⁷⁹

The HIV/AIDS epidemic as discussed in Chapter Four, has greatly impacted Black churches, and once those impacted by the disease feel as if they are apart of a welcoming church family, they will begin to seek pastoral care more readily. In preaching and worship, Sundays are often the only times that a pastor encounters the entire congregation. The entire worship experience should be fashioned in a manner that is welcoming, and inclusive of the entire flock. The primary focus is to set an atmosphere for all that are present to have an encounter with God.

The four pastoral functions of healing, guiding, sustaining, and reconciling suggests a few prompts for a Pastor as it relates to shepherding the flock. Pastors and ministry leaders can aid members of their congregations with same-sex attractions through the healing process from

¹⁷⁸ Marvin Andrew McMickle, *Caring Pastors, Caring People: Equipping Your Church for Pastoral Care*, first edition (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 62.

¹⁷⁹ Lartey, *In Living Color*, 59.

mental and physical abuse, illness, strained relationships or the stressors associated with their sexual orientation. Pastors can guide members by aiding them with resources within the church and community to assist with employment, legal services, and spiritual counseling. Sustaining, in this sense, occurs when the factors present in the healing process are not healed, but require a lengthy process to endure them. The Pastor provides comfort, support and encouragement during the process. Reconciling in this sense can occur as pastors aid members with same-sex attractions in reconciling with family members, friends, members of the Church, and the Church itself.

Another added dimension to pastoral care as shepherd in this context is the shepherding of families-at-large with men with same-sex attractions in them. These family members have additional challenges based upon where they are theologically concerning same-sex attractions. These theological beliefs can further complicate a difficult situation. Especially in the case of a minor that has disclosed that he has same-sex attractions. The Pastor as shepherd can provide pastoral care in the sense that he can educate the family on same-sex attractions, all the while provide support to the family member and the family at large. The presence of a pastor providing pastoral care as shepherd can facilitate a loving and caring atmosphere.

Spiritual Care - A Loving and Caring Congregation

There are many views as to how spiritual care for men with same-sex attractions in the context of Black churches should be approached. One overarching view is that the context of pastoral care is a task that is best carried out by several rather than solely resting on the Pastor. As Theologian Dr. Carroll Watkins Ali, a proponent of this view states, “current paradigms of pastoral theology and care - in their individualistic approaches - are inadequate for the pastoral

care needs of African Americans collectively.”¹⁸⁰ Spiritual care as ministry has God and God’s people as its focus. In that context, it is understood that some of these functions require the “village” to carry them out. Dr. Ali argues, “...the communal concern for the majority of African Americans requires a community effort or a network of caregivers working with the pastor / pastoral caregiver...it is quite clear that the resources needed are beyond the scope of an individual caregiver. There also needs to be ongoing provisions for the persons whose critical needs are extended over a long duration....The Pastoral Care needs of the African American context requires an expansion of the traditional aspects of shepherding beyond healing, sustaining, and guiding. In essence, the pastoral care of Black Americans, who are faced with critical concerns involved in the struggle for survival liberation, needs to expand to include functions that are also *nurturing*, and *empowering*, and, ultimately, *liberating* in praxis.”¹⁸¹

Gleaning from the work of Dr. Wimberly, Dr. Lartey states, “...The communal framework is crucial. Pastoral care especially in the Black church tradition has to do with mobilizing the resources of the total community in caring for the needs of individuals and groups.”¹⁸²

In line with Dr. Wimberly’s model of pastoral care as “the bringing to bear of the total ministry of the church upon persons and families in crisis,” the importance of the entire congregations involvement in the sustaining function of pastoral care is brought to the forefront. In Black churches, small groups, auxiliaries, and various ministries are vital lifelines in the church. These ministries are often called upon to meet the needs of those within the congregation. Dr. Wimberly states, “In Wednesday night prayer and Bible study meetings,

¹⁸⁰ Carroll Watkins Ali, *Survival and Liberation: Pastoral Theology in African American Context* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 1999), xiv.

¹⁸¹ Ali, *Survival and Liberation*, 8.

¹⁸² Lartey, *In Living Color*, 24.

significant hurts have been healed. In the pastor's study, many small groups have prayed for and with people in difficulties. When the choir has surrounded its members in need, significant caring has taken place. It is through these actions that those persons in need of care receive the total ministry of the Church, and are drawn into the faith community. Worship in the corporate sense takes place at this point and the communal resources have been brought forth to meet the need the personal need. The end result becomes pastoral care has taken place and the emotional, interpersonal, and psychological needs of persons have been met.¹⁸³

Although most Black churches have fallen short in providing a caring environment for Black men with same-sex attractions, there have been some wonderful examples of predominantly Black churches curating a caring environment. Albeit few, there are a growing number of churches that have become known for being welcoming and/or affirming to LGBTQ community. One church in particular that is welcoming and affirming, Rivers at Rehoboth Church in Harlem, "has made ministry to gay men and lesbians, combined with the worship traditions of Black churches, its mission" is pastored by Pastor Vanessa M. Brown, and Pastor Joseph Tolton.¹⁸⁴ In *A Whosoever Church*, in response to the question, "One of the questions I've asked other pastors is how and why they have been able to change from a less accepting to a more accepting position on lesbians and gay men," Rev. Dr. Cecil "Chip Murray, is quoted as saying:

I think anyone who has been on the griddle knows what the heat is. Coming from the Deep South of segregation, I have known the heat of being made to feel the outsider. If the fire doesn't sensitize a human being, then that human being borders on the hopeless. If one who has known what it is to be ostracized does not have a bridge of empathy to anyone else who is ostracize, then that person himself or herself is shut out. I think we tend to do that, because we have had it done to ourselves. When I feel shut out, I shut out

¹⁸³ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 24.

¹⁸⁴ Gerren Keith Gaynor, "Black Gay Men and Lesbians Find Embrace at Harlem Church," *The New York Times*, May 27, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/28/nyregion/black-gay-men-and-lesbians-find-embrace-at-harlem-church.html>.

others. When I feel inferior, I project that onto others. When I feel insecure, I passed the insecurity along. So to ask why my arms would be outstretched, I would only be able to answer that my arms have felt the heat and the pain, and I am determined never, ever, ever to cause heat and pain to anyone else on the outside.¹⁸⁵

Rev. Dr. Murray is the former pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal Church (First AME). Under his leadership of 27 years, the membership of the church grew from 250 to 18,000 making it the oldest and one of the largest Black congregations in Los Angeles.¹⁸⁶ With over forty community-outreach task forces with programs ranging from HIV/AIDS to Pan-Africanism, the church has been a beacon of light not only in the Black community, but in the LGBTQ community as a welcoming church.

At the heart of being a caring congregation and providing spiritual care is love. Love is the motivation. Central to Christianity is *agape*, the unconditional love that is given by God to humankind. It is in this model of God's love towards us, that we in turn should share with one another, regardless of one's sexual orientation. Dr. Lartey suggests, "The Christian teaching of incarnation, seeks to convey and 'enfleshing' of *agape* in a historic person - Jesus Christ - who becomes the icon and enabler of such love for and in his followers. Such self-giving love is at the heart of the Christian gospel and is the impelling force behind Christian action. Men with same-sex attractions that attend church are seeking a safe place where they may participate in a worship experience in the context of a welcoming congregation. Being welcomed into the congregation is foundational in the support that they receive from the church. This reception fosters an atmosphere of trust and transparency. Ministry must be focused on the person and not the stereotypes associated with same-sex attractions. With the focus on the person, we can

¹⁸⁵ Comstock, *A Whosoever Church*, 76.

¹⁸⁶ Comstock, *A Whosoever Church*, 75.

provide holistic pastoral and spiritual care with the person's psychological, ethical and theological frames of reference.

Spiritual care within most Black churches has come with boundaries. That is to say, that many ministries that have homophobic views pick and choose which congregants receive or for that matter do not receive the "right hand of fellowship"¹⁸⁷ or be treated with a welcoming attitude. Dr. McMickle speaks to this by giving examples of how ministries approach this issue, "...whose burdens of sorrow will we be willing to bear? Whose sickness will touch our hearts and prod us into action? For whom will we be willing to pray?" The compassion and concern displaced by Christ in Matthew 25:31-46 should be used as an example by all congregations. By using The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, Christ gives us a model of spiritual care and a model that is not reflective of spiritual care. Jesus says in verses 34-46:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ The Right Hand of Fellowship is a ritualistic gesture intended to welcome congregants into the church. It based on Galatians 2:9 where Paul states, "James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me."

¹⁸⁸ Matthew 25:34-46 (NIV). The text of this translation does not have closing quotes for certain lines, i.e. "When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" "The King will reply,..." (verse 39-40).

The overarching task in the example of spiritual care provided by Christ is that where there is a need, regardless of who is in need, there is always an opportunity for ministry to go forth. As Christians, we are not to be resisters of persons; rather, we must have a desire to be available for God to use us in any situation (Romans 2:9-11).

The taboo attitude about same-sex attractions that is rooted in church bylaws have spilled over to the overall culture in the church. To heal these broken relationships church culture must have an honest conversation about how they elect to apply Biblical interpretations of some scripture verses other based on cultural times. The selective categories of Biblical sin versus the Biblical truth of Jesus' mandate against condemnation has impacted church culture in a myriad of ways. The culture in certain Black congregations is not welcoming of Black men with same-sex attractions. Further, they do not provide support ministries where Black men with same-sex attractions feel comfortable joining for guidance, sustaining the support of fellow church members when going through personal problems, etc. Addressing the biases in church culture and lack of spiritual support services is the first step in reconciliation for the church community to effectively provide spiritual care to Black gay men.

Spiritual Care of Those Outside the Church

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 as previously mentioned in Chapter 3, is arguably one of the most recognizable scriptures of Christianity. This mandate sends the believer on a mission outside of the community of believers, and outside of the walls of the physical church. A few chapters prior to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, we find in Matthew 9:35-38, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep

without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Few Black churches in the United States have a positive track record of healthy relationships within the LGBTQ community. Of note in Los Angeles, CA, First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles pastored by Pastor J. Edgar Boyd who in fact has a division of ministries entitled, FAME Beyond The Walls Ministries, West Angeles Church of God In Christ pastored by Bishop Charles E. Blake who has a community service ministry (family and economic development, at-risk youth, financial literacy, community revitalization, education, community assistance, community development, etc.) , and Faithful Central Bible Church pastored by Bishop Kenneth C. Ulmer who has a community service ministry (stewardship, family development, counseling center, global missions, recovery, political action, etc.) All three of the ministries have a ministry that is addressing not only the HIV/AIDS epidemic in one way or another, are welcoming ministries and are addressing issues surrounding same-sex attractions. Other than these ministries who have programs and services, there are not many well documented experiences of spiritual care of this group of oppressed Black men.

Human well-being with a focus on the individual is a key tenet of pastoral care. In light of this, social and political matters are often overlooked as being relevant to the care of congregants.¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, these areas are of the uttermost importance as they often are impactful on individuals and the pastoral care needs of those individuals. Dr. Stephen Pattison argues, “The focus of modern pastoral care theory and practice has been arbitrarily and narrowly on the individual. Arguably, social injustice and inequality must be central themes in any discussion of general human welfare. They have received scant attention in contemporary

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5.

pastoral care. Practically, this means that at best pastoral care is myopic.” For pastoral care within the context of Black churches to remain relevant, it must speak to and meet the current needs of the people of the community. With love for all humankind at the heart, the Church is not only impelled to lovingly steward its relationships with those with same-sex attractions both inside and outside of the Church. As an avenue to do so, the Church must continue to embrace the need for involvement in the eradication of injustices, and political influence.

Prior to the Church being able to sound the alarm on all the injustices that are taking place in the community, it is of uttermost importance that it first takes ownership of the damage that it has done. Men with same-sex attractions are in need of a healing and a nurturing ministry. Many male congregants that identify with same-sex attractions feel wounded by a hurtful and prejudiced society, and often feel victimized by the theological-driven homophobia of the Church. First and foremost, the Church must take responsibility for the damage that it has done in negatively shaping the attitudes and views of those within the Black community towards those with same-sex attractions. Secondly, the Church must apologize to those within the LGBTQ community for making them feel as if they were secondary citizens in society, and certainly in the Body of Christ. The church must avail itself to be a catalyst of healing, and a conduit of the grace of God. By being understanding, accepting, non-condemnatory, and attentively listening, as pastors and ministry leaders we can gain the trust of those that have been hurt by the society and the Church. These expressions of empathy foster a positive relationship and cultivates an atmosphere of healing. It is at that point that we will gain entree into being able to sustain and even guide them through some of their most challenging issues that are inextricably woven into the fabrics of their lives due to their sexual orientation. Whether gay sex or straight sex, all things surrounding sexual identity, desire, and practice are viewed with the same lens when grace

is applied. We were all born into sin which has led to brokenness as a part of the natural order. To this Rakestraw states, “God is actively working, because of and through Jesus Christ, toward the restoration of all creation, including every person today who sincerely cries out to him for sexual wholeness, with faith as a little child.” It is through this grace that restoration, and reconciliation takes place.

Once Black churches have become freed from their stigmas which are steeped in homophobic views, they will be able to once again function in their roles as freedom fighters. They will be able to join in and support the social issues (healthcare, etc) that the Black LGBTQ community has been fighting for years.

Spiritual Care as Social Action

In earlier chapters, we highlighted the spiritual care Black churches exemplified as the catalyst and leaders on numerous social issues such as: voting rights, racial oppression, gender inequities, etc. However, spiritual care in the form of advocacy for Black men with same-sex attractions has never been a major agenda item for Black churches. Sadly, this is the reality even though Black Men with same-sex attractions are faced with injustices on many levels. Researchers found, “Poverty has been identified by the United Nations Population Fund (2003) as a critical factor in the spread and treatment of HIV. For many gay and bisexual men of color, economic inequalities add to the pernicious effects of oppression and homophobia. For example, in a seven-city study of HIV prevalence among young gay and bisexual men, Harawa et al. (2004) found prevalence rates of 16 percent for Black men, 6.9 percent for Latinos, and 3.3 percent for Whites, despite the fact that the White men reported potentially risky sex and drug-using behaviors with greater frequency. In this sample, however, such indicators of socioeconomic status as unemployment and lack of formal education were highly associated with

HIV infection, suggesting socioeconomic inequalities suffered by the racial and ethnic minority men.” The data is clear, but the Black church has ignored the pressing social issues pertaining to the needs of Black men with same-sex attractions. They not only face racial oppressions by society, but also prejudice by their Black community. Many are subjected to discrimination, physical and verbal abuse, and sometimes even rape and murder. These violent offenses frequently go unreported, thusly the perpetrators go unpunished.

Many men in the LGBT community are also impacted with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in one way or another. In a press release by the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, a division of the Center for Disease Control, it was reported that “Gay and bisexual men continue to be most affected by the HIV epidemic in the U.S. At current rates, 1 in 6 MSM will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime, including 1 in 2 Black MSM, 1 in 4 Latino MSM, and 1 in 11 white MSM.”¹⁹⁰ These figures are astounding and Black churches collectively have been all but silent with respect to HIV/AIDS. By speaking truth with power, supporting laws protecting the basic human rights, and being mindful to not say or do anything to condones, or inspires oppression, discrimination, Black churches could be helpful by using their influence within the Black community and thusly society to join the struggle towards the liberation of the LGBTQ community in these areas.

In an article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, it was reported that, “Nationwide, 38 percent of Blacks got consistent care for HIV from 2011 to 2013, compared with about half for whites and Hispanics, according to the new findings, which are based on National HIV Surveillance System records and were published Thursday in the CDC’s ‘Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.’ People living with HIV who receive continuing treatment remain

¹⁹⁰ National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, "Half of black gay men and a quarter of Latino gay men projected to be diagnosed within their lifetime," press release, February 23, 2016, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2016/croi-press-release-risk.html>.

healthier than those who do not, according to the CDC, and they also dramatically reduce their risk of transmitting the virus to others. The new findings are significant as Blacks are disproportionately affected by the virus in Georgia. For example, in 2013, Blacks accounted for 66 percent of people living with HIV in the state, though they comprised only 31 percent of Georgia's population. In contrast, Blacks represent 12 percent of the population nationwide but accounted for almost 50 percent of HIV diagnoses in 2014."¹⁹¹ With the present disparities in health care for Black men and women, the leaders of Black churches can use their influence to join in the fight to eradicating the HIV epidemic via social and legislative interventions.

Spiritual Care as Empowerment

Parachurch organizations like the Marin Foundation, founded by Andrew Marin, play a vital role in spiritual care for oppressed individuals. The Marin Foundation has as its focus, "to build bridges between the LGBTQ community and conservatives through scientific research, biblical and social education, and diverse community gatherings."¹⁹² In his book, *Love is an Orientation*, Andrew Marin focuses on dialogue that is being had individually in the LGBTQ and Church communities.¹⁹³ By creating a safe, neutral space, the two communities are able to come to common grounds with respect to bridging the gap between them. At core, the bridge leads both communities to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Black churches and religious organizations alike have been the catalyst of racial justice concerns, and the cornerstone of most of the social and political movements that have been mobilized within the Black community. Black men with same-sex attractions face ongoing

¹⁹¹ Jeremy Redmon, "CDC: Blacks with HIV Less Likely to Receive Consistent Medical Care," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/cdc-blacks-with-hiv-less-likely-receive-consistent-medical-care/DIphRvFHbyemUHIKN6GvdJ/>.

¹⁹² "Mission," The Marin Foundation, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.themarinfoundation.org/about-us/mission/>.

¹⁹³ Andrew P. Marin, *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).

barriers to personal, family and community development.¹⁹⁴ Because of its influence in the Black community, Black churches can aid in the empowering men with same-sex attractions in these areas by implementing social change strategies.

Other organizations providing resources for LGBT in general and Black gays in particular include the Institute for Welcoming Resources which offers vital information and outlets for Black gay men in search of spiritual guidance and pastoral care.¹⁹⁵

The parachurch's strong leadership role in supporting oppressed individuals is truly representative of implementing God's grace on humankind. While some religious groups have taken a hardline stance against same-sex attractions, and in some instances, been described as the catalyst for violence some para-church leaders have been a source of support. For example, after the mass killings which transpired in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida in 2016 Tim Tebow, a highly visible evangelical Christian made a strong statement when he visited the hospitals and spent meaningful time offering support to the victims.¹⁹⁶

Gender and Sexuality Through the Lens of Spiritual Care

Men with same-sex attractions have had their voices silenced because of their sexual identities. By examining gender and sexuality in its theological constructs within Black churches, a platform for spiritual care and the processes of healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling can be set. One of the views that tends to resonate in Black theological circles is that of Dr. Patricia Hill Collins. To this she states, "Clearly dialogues need to occur between conservative Black Christian churches that advance one stance on homosexuality and movements for lesbian, gay,

¹⁹⁴ Linda D. Garnets and Anthony R. D'Augelli, "Empowering Lesbian and Gay Communities: A Call for Collaboration with Community Psychology," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 22, no. 4 (August 1, 1994): 453, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506889>.

¹⁹⁵ "Links," The Institute for Welcoming Resources, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.welcomingresources.org/links.htm>.

¹⁹⁶ "Tim Tebow Visits Orlando Shooting Victim in Hospital | SI.com," accessed November 23, 2017, <https://www.si.com/extra-mustard/2016/06/22/orlando-nightclub-pulse-shooting-tim-tebow-visits-victim-hospital>.

bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) rights that advance another. African Americans will learn much about how Jewish men and women have different issues, or how urbanization shapes the sexual politics of many groups in cities around the world. Developing a progressive Black sexual politics that fosters social justice requires engaging people who are positioned inside and outside of African American communities.”¹⁹⁷

There are varying views with respect to the origins of the issues within the Black community surrounding gender. The parachurch does a good job of spiritual care without being weighed down by theological interpretations of gender, sexuality, and opinions on celibacy.

Conclusion

These models of pastoral and spiritual care are important today because they provide a roadmap that is inclusive of holistically integrating the care seeker into the “reconnecting with the goodness of life.”¹⁹⁸ One of the essential goals of pastoral and spiritual care is the deepening of one's connection with the goodness of life. One of the many roles of a caregiver is to equip the care seeker with the tools to identify those moments that deepens this connection on one hand, and journey through spiritual and religious challenges that threaten on the other.¹⁹⁹

Spiritual leaders of Black churches are being called to provide spiritual care to *all* in the manner that Christ would, by ministering grace and mercy to all. By making the gospel relevant and fleshing out its core tenants for a time such as this, Black churches will foster a safe place of refuge for men with same-sex attractions. Under such healthy spiritual care these men can process the life realities of living in a society that typically oppresses them with slurs, violence and alienation based on their race and sexual orientation.

¹⁹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

¹⁹⁸ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 185.

¹⁹⁹ Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 185.

For Christ centered pastoral care to be manifested it needs to reflect God's love and caring as a ministry. This mindset of love and care is essential for those inside and outside of the church who desire to be vessels of healthy spiritual and pastoral care for Black men with same-sex attractions. Dr. Wimberly posits, "Caring is a Ministry of the church and cannot be understood apart from the eschatology color or theological of the church. The mission of the church, from a narrative perspective in the Black church, is a continuation of God's story. It is the story of a Liberation and healing as understood centrally in the book of Exodus, has continued through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as we feel today within local churches, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The unfolding story of God's Rule and Reign is character is characterized by God's ongoing activity to bring all dimensions of the world under God's leadership and story for the purposes of Liberation, healing, and wholeness. This results in personal and social transformation."²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 25.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study explored the impact of Black churches on the attitudes and experiences of Black MSM. The research comprised of reviewing writings, highlighting opinions from religious leaders and theologians, summarizing information gleaned from interviews with Black MSM, and coordinating data from national surveys. This chapter summarizes the first four Chapters, discusses how the discoveries compare to previous research, offers implications for religious leaders and church members, and closes with final comments.

Summary of the Study

This study was inspired by research findings that noted the struggles of Black MSM, with acceptance in the Black community, their negative experiences in Black churches, and the difficulties they have revealing their sexual preferences to close family and friends.²⁰¹ Although past research suggests Black men with same-sex attractions are not welcomed in Black churches, there is limited research examining why this is occurring, and far less discussion on ways to improve the relationship between Black churches and Black men with same-sex attractions. This research study sought out to address some of the gaps in the problem that exists between Black churches and Black men who desire a healthy relationship in a community that builds up their faith.

Noted scholar and theologian, Dr. Richard R. Osmer's four tasks of practical theology were used as the framework for this examination of the gap between Black churches and Black MSM who are desirous of a healthy relationship in a community of faith. These tasks were used

²⁰¹ Balaji, et al., "Role Flexing," 2; Seele, *Stand Up to Stigma*, 72.

with the intention of inspiring genuine discourse and priestly listening on the divisive topic of homosexuality in Black churches. Dr. Osmer's four models of practical theology are: (1) The descriptive-empirical task, 'What is going on?' (2) The interpretive task, 'Why is it going on?' (3) The normative task, 'What ought to be going on?' (4) The pragmatic task, 'How might we respond?'²⁰²

Chapter One outlined the structure of this study and highlighted the research questions. The purpose of this project is to take an in-depth look at how Black church's views on homosexuality influence the self-identity, social interactions, spiritual development, and church involvement among Black men with same-sex attractions. In particular, do these beliefs expressed within Black churches bylaws and in religious teachings encourage or discourage Black church involvement among men with same-sex attractions.

Chapter Two reviewed the history of homophobia in the Black Community, the importance of Black churches in the context of the Black Community, and Black Churches views on homosexuality. The main areas covered were: (1) The History of Homophobia in the Black Community, (2) Black Churches, (3) Black Churches Shared Theological Belief on Homosexuality, (4) Homosexual Leadership in Black Churches, (5) and Theologically-Driven Homophobia and Religious Oppression of Black Men with Same-Sex Attractions within Black Churches.

The literature examined included *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches*, written by Dr. Horace Griffin, and *The Role of the Black Church in the Lives of Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men*, research was conducted by Dr. Katherine Quinn, Dr. Julia Dickson-Gomez and Dr. Jeffrey A. Kelly. According to Dr. C.

²⁰² Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

Eric Lincoln and Dr. Lawrence H. Mamiya, in *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, the seven leading Black denominations have differences in theology, ways of worship, music and liturgy. While all seven denominations share a commitment to serve the Black community, they also share strong theological stance against homosexuality.

Chapter Three reviewed the literature on Internalized Homophobia and its Impact. The three main areas covered were: (1) Projection and Internalization of Homophobia in Black Churches and its Impact, (2) Internalized Homophobia and Religious Affiliation, (3) Describing Internalized Homophobia, (4) Health and Social Effects of Religious Affiliation: A Blessing and a Curse, (5) Mental Stressors that Contribute to Internalized Homophobia, (6) Internalized Homophobia and Dual Identities, and (7) Implications of Internalized Homophobia.

Researchers argue although religious affiliation in the Black community is important, it can have both positive and negative mental health outcomes. Black MSM face a unique set of sociocultural stressors, and research suggests that they are more susceptible to and “are disproportionately burdened by mental health problems and disorders, with the most severe being depression, anxiety, and suicidality (i.e., suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and completed suicides).”²⁰³ The internalization of negative attitudes is one of the most pervasive theoretical models that has been identified as a pathway to these negative mental health outcomes. Specifically, the Internalized Homophobia that Black MSM with religious affiliations in Black churches face through the prevalence of theologically-driven homophobic sermon messages and negative attitudes that they are subjected to in Black congregations would be the culprit in this case.

²⁰³ Treadwell et al., *Social Determinants of Health Among African-American Men*, 64.

Chapter Four is a five part exploration of homophobia and Black churches which began by discussing the church's beliefs about homosexuality, and Black churches theological attitudes that breed homophobia. Second, an in-depth review of the theological shifts of Black churches on controversial social issues over time in comparison to homosexuality. The third part is comprised of a look into the pervasive attitudes and beliefs about HIV/AIDS in the Black community and its connection to the spiritual and cultural views about homosexuality that have been fueled in Black churches. Part four focused on highlighting general principles of Christian grace, how that grace is or is not exemplified within Black churches when it pertains to homosexuality. The fifth and final part entailed a brief offering for Black churches to progressively move towards positive responses to the members of its congregations with same-sex attractions.

The emphasis of Chapter Four was to highlight solutions that have been attempted inside and outside of the Black church to improve the spiritual care received by Black MSM. There are varying views on how Pastoral and Spiritual care should be approached in the context of Black churches. By using William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jackle's definition of the field in *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* as a working definition a foundation was laid.²⁰⁴

In Chapter Five, with the aid of three noted theologians and authors, Dr. Emmanuel Y. Lartey, Dr. Edward P Wimberly and Dr. Carroll Watkins Ali, Pastoral and Spiritual care was viewed in the context of Black churches. The three specific models which easily lend themselves to a pastoral care appropriation were used from Dr. Emmanuel Y. Lartey's book, *In Living Color*. Those models are pastoral care as ministry, pastoral care as social action, and pastoral care as empowerment.

²⁰⁴ Clebsch and Jackle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 4.

The application of pastoral care and its primary four functions of *healing*, *sustaining*, *guiding* and *reconciling* were of focus and suggested as ministry resources. The *healing* process in which restoration, healing of wounds, repairing and recovery of that which has been lost takes place.²⁰⁵ The *sustaining* process provides assistance to persons in an effort for them to persevere and transcend difficult and trying situations. The process of *guiding* is aiding a person in the midst of a challenging situation by offering alternative choices in an effort to resolve the challenging situation(s) they face. Restoration of broken relationship is the process of *reconciliation*. This restoration takes place between God, the person, and others.²⁰⁶

Limitations

Since the focus of this study was on laying the foundation on the source of the problem and highlight what researchers have deemed as the main issues, there was no time spent on conducting first hand interviews with Black MSM. Given that homophobia and racial oppression are ever evolving topics that are a hotbed issue in 2017 and likely in the years to come this study would have benefitted from first hand interviews with Black MSM. If the researcher was able to cross reference past research with the impressions of Black MSM in 2017-2018 additional data may have been available and beneficial for a deeper understanding of the progress or lack thereof. Also, relying on interviews conducted with pastors from 10 years ago about the church's interactions with Black MSM has limitations, because some experiences may be specific to a church, denomination or geographic region of the country.

In retrospect if this study were conducted again, the researcher may have conducted interviews of Black male participants ranging in ages from 18-65 that identified as gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Participants would be recruited from churches across the United

²⁰⁵ Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, 18.

²⁰⁶ Wimberly, *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, 18.

States that were representative of the seven historically Black churches, LGB community centers and organizations, high school and universities.

Findings

The goal of this research was to examine the background of homophobic views in Black churches and its impact on influencing the self-identity, social interactions, spiritual development, and church involvement among men with same-sex attractions. To accomplish this goal it was imperative to analyze to beliefs versus the practices within the Black churches and identify any contradictions. This research revealed several contradictions of the Black churches and addressed when it pertains to their spiritual hypocrisy about Black gay men involvement in the church. After highlighting the roots of the issues substantive effort was used to build practical models for repair. In Chapter Four the conversation shifted to Spiritual and Pastoral care and offered four dimensions the Black Church can assess their efforts to repair relationships with the Black gay community.

Discussion

Over the past few decades there have been many works done by scholars addressing the issues and tensions of the intersections of race, religion, and sexuality. Within the last decade or so, works addressing issues facing Black men that identity with the LGBTQ community have flourished. My concluding analysis of the above material suggests that there are three distinct areas in which Black gay men that attend Black churches are oppressed. They are oppressed racially, because of the color of their skin, they are oppressed socially, because of their sexual orientation and lastly, they are oppressed religiously, because of their sexual orientation.

It is apparent that there is a grave need for continued dialogue to close the gap between those that identify with the LGBTQ community and those within Black churches. There is a pink

elephant in the room and neither side is taking action to resolve the issue at hand. Many of the congregations that are silent on the issue are filled with men and women struggling with the very same issue. And many of the congregations that are addressing the issue, are addressing it incorrectly. It is my hope that “Black churches” are engaged to call into question their views of same-attractions, and evolve by offering a new perspective and interpretation of scripture with respect to liberation from its current position on the matter.

This project has examined the tensions of the intersections of sexuality and religion in the context of the reality of Black churches and homophobia. The hope is that this will be the continuance of fruitful dialogue towards mutual understanding between those who identify as having same-sex attractions, and those that would stand in judgment in the Church. Future research will do well to consider exploring how Black churches are addressing the impact of their beliefs and actions have on Black gay men.

After years of combing the scriptures, self-reflection, and asking the tough questions of those in leadership over them, countless men with same-sex attractions are coming to the conclusion ‘that a change has gotta come.’ ‘A change has gotta come’ with respect to the pain, suffering, sadness, and abuse that they have suffered in their lives by the hand of Black Churches.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a tremendous amount of room for future research to explore the role of religiosity and spirituality in the lives Black men with same-sex attractions, while at the time providing a platform to tell the stories of these men of faith. Future research on the Biblical hermeneutical issues surrounding homosexuality, Black churches and same-sex marriage, and Apathy towards involvement in Black churches from gay individuals and supporters of gay

rights is also in order given that existing literature raises not only questions but concerns about these issues.

Conclusion

I close with a scripture from Matthew 25:40-46, which says ““The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”²⁰⁷

If one embraces the author’s declaration a question emerges - what happens to Black MSM who don’t know what to think about God when the church has not treated them well. I connected with this research as a student with interests in conducting research, and person desirous of authoring works centered on the intersection of religion in modern culture, and the impact music, film and television has on shaping beliefs about religion. In particular, my interests are in the comparative studies between ancient Biblical scriptures, religious literature, and contemporary beliefs about gender roles, sexual identity, and social change through religious institutions of modern times.

²⁰⁷ Matthew 25:40-56 (NIV).

Over the past twenty-seven years, my journey towards this goal has been circuitous at best. It has carried me throughout a career as a personal manager for Grammy award winning Gospel Artists, music supervisor for Hollywood movies, and working with internationally renowned pastors of megachurches. The years spent in Gospel music enabled me to build strong personal friendships with singers and musicians who wrestled with many of the issues identified in this research, the torment and sincere theological questions they had. And having worked with and encountered several highly regarded pastors and ingesting their doctrinal stances about homosexuality challenged my beliefs in countless ways. Both of these experiences served as a major inspiration for my exploration of this topic. Working in entertainment and serving in church ministry provided priceless insight into the impact of media on shaping societies' interpretations of faith and religion, and serving in ministry ignited a passion for studying Scripture, and learning how principles and themes in Scripture can be made relevant to modern culture.

My active involvement in church leadership for decades, coupled with, being a seminarian gave me pause for thought to the diverse and often controversial manner in which Pauline scriptures have been interpreted, and applied to attitudes about race, gender issues, and sexual orientation. Although the coursework in seminary highlighted important topics, it showed me several areas that warranted future research. I want to contribute to theological scholarship by delving deeper into the Sacred Scriptures and religious literature with unbridled exploration and unabridged research. This future research could possibly present occasion for an overhaul with respect to the manner in which Sacred Scriptures, and religious literature of yesterday are interpreted, and ultimately impact how they are understood today upon being juxtaposed against the issues of present day culture.

This was the impetus to my realization that there was not only a void in the research into the Sacred Scriptures, and religious literature with respect to present day questions and cultural concerns, but moreover, there was a misunderstanding of the same. This chasm creates an outstanding opportunity in society to do some stellar research and shed light on the issues and concerns that are being championed by our society.

Up until ten years ago, my views of homosexuality were based on what the bylaws of Black churches, and the fire and brimstone messages I often heard preached from pulpits. In recent years my personal relationship with Christ and thirst to delve deeper in Scripture challenged me to go beyond what the church bylaws and preachers have shared, and forced me to learn more for myself. I toiled over whether or not this research would confirm that which I had been taught, or confront that which I had been taught. As I close that chapter of research and this stage of academia, this study has simply drawn me closer to loving and not judging Black men with same-sex attractions. I realize that the same grace that God affords me; is the same grace that God affords Black MSM. The same Christ that hung on a cross on Calvary and died for me; hung on a cross on Calvary and died for them. The ‘whosoever believes in Him should not perish that applies to me; applies to them.

Ministry is a service that is about teaching individuals to love God and love their neighbors as themselves. If pastoral leaders and Black congregations believe those are God’s two greatest commandments that is where true ministry should always be grounded. The racial, social, and religious oppressions are too great to not promote a welcoming environment for people who have been ostracized by their family at the least, or facing terminal sickness at the worst. It is my prayer that the discoveries presented, offer pastors with information to bring about change. It is also my sincere hope that Black MSM find healthy, supportive, loving

ministries where they can grow in their faith and trust in a God who loves all humankind unconditionally.

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